

Harmony

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Harmony

by [St4rDustSp33dW4y](#)

Summary

Please, you need to be 18+ to read and interact with me. Thank you.

With one last swift kick, the last robot falls to the ground. Eggman's robots were all over the place and if that's the case, Sonic must be nearby. Shadow isn't too worried though. He's been having Rouge hack into the doctor's database and nothing in his plans seem to be anything the blue hedgehog can't handle. If there were any red flags, he'd know about them.

But still...

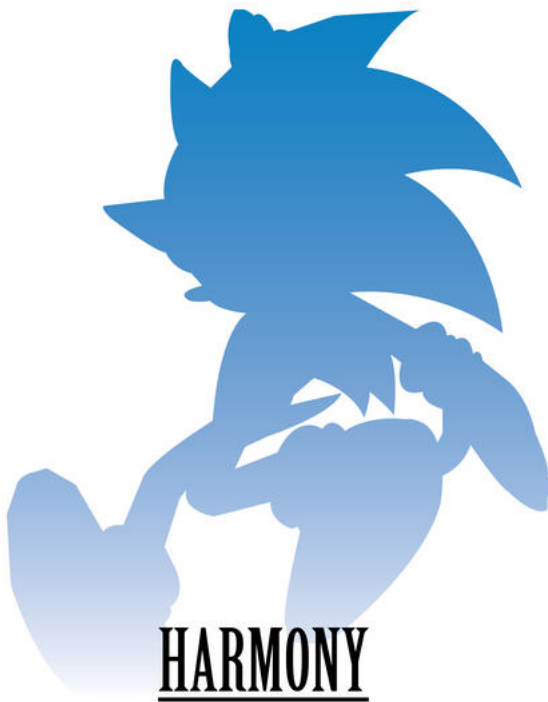
Notes

Important: This story is NOT canon. It is an AU.

This will be multiple parts and I will link them together when I get to it.
For right now, enjoy! Comments are appreciated, but ghosting is cool too.
Hope you like this. I'll be updating as regularly as I can.
Thanks in advance for the patience.

Also, warning: This will be explicit later.

Trust



Chapter One: Trust

With one last swift kick, the last robot falls to the ground. Eggman's robots were all over the place and if that's the case, Sonic *must* be nearby. Shadow isn't too worried though. He's been having Rouge hack into the doctor's database and nothing in his plans seem to be anything the blue hedgehog can't handle. If there were any red flags, he'd know about them.

But still...

Shadow lifts his communicator to his mouth and asks, "Shadow to Rouge. Do we have a visual on Sonic and his friends?"

Rouge's voice comes to life in his ear with an amused tone, "Not yet. Why? Are you worried?"

Shadow makes a displeased noise, "Like I care. Sonic has a Chaos Emerald. I just don't want the doctor to gain possession of it."

"Rather it be in Sonic's possession than Eggman's?" She asks with a giggle.

"Exactly," he confirms, "Just keep me updated on their whereabouts. I'm going to clear out the next area. Make sure to contact me when Omega reaches the rendezvous point."

"Will do, Shadow," Rouge responds before the line goes silent again.

Holding the green emerald over his head, Shadow uses Chaos Control to warp to the next area of the city. Just as he suspected too. More robots. He falls back into the shadows and watches them. They don't seem to be patrolling like the others. Instead, it looks like they have something. Shadow gets a

closer look and realizes it's Sonic's fox friend.

Shadow lowers his brow and warps closer. He appears and vanishes as he reduces the robots into scrap metal. He saws off the arms of the robot that has Tails, freeing the poor fox kid. He appears one last time to finish the robot by punching his fist through its body and pulling out a handful of sparking cords. He drops the remains on the ground and dusts himself off.

"Shadow! Thank you!" Tails says graciously.

"Where are the others," Shadow asks gruffly. This scene concerns him. If Tails had been captured and not immediately rescued by the blue hedgehog himself something was up.

"The others have taken cover. The hoards of robots ganged up on us and we had to fall back," Tails explains a bit distraughtly.

"And Sonic?" Shadow asks because he knows Sonic wasn't one to fall back like that.

"He... He went ahead. He used Chaos Control to get into Eggman's flying fortress. My sensors aren't picking up his chaos energy anymore. That's why I came out to search for him," Tails tells him quickly.

"Stay here," Shadow orders as he looks up into the sky. He sees the aircraft like a horrendous gash among the clouds.

"I want to come with! I need to know if he's okay! He's like a brother to me," Tails exclaims desperately.

Shadow seems conflicted. The fox will definitely slow him down. That, and if Sonic left the kid behind he must have foreseen some kind of danger.

"Please?" Tails begs, "If you take me there, I'll be able to scan the area and find him. This way it'll be a stealth mission. It's a win-win."

The kid has a point. As much as he hates to admit it. Shadow caves, "Fine, but when I tell you to fall back..."

"I'll fall back," Tails finishes obediently, "I won't get in your way, Shadow."

Shadow seems a bit impressed. Smart kid. He just hopes Tails can keep his end of the bargain. He'd prefer doing this with Rouge because she seems to have the combat power, but she's at HQ. Besides, he needs to infiltrate this base immediately. No delays.

"Alright," Shadow agrees. He holds his hand out and lets Tails take it. He holds his emerald over his head once more and initiates Chaos Control. They disappear behind a flash of light and when they appear again, they land lightly with a clank on metal flooring.

Tails huddles over his tracker and Shadow side-eyes it. Tails smiles when he finally gets a signal. He sighs in relief and maps out a course for them to take. "His heat signature seems to be moving," Tails explains with excitement.

Shadow notes the erratic movements. He must be fighting something. Shadow nods and orders Tails to follow him. They make their way down corridors in the direction of the speedster. Shadow stops when he hears a voice.

"Is that all you got, Egg-head? You must be getting rusty. I came up here expecting a challenge."

It's Sonic's voice. He'd be able to tell by the idiotic banter alone. He signals for Tails to stay behind as he induces Chaos Control once more.

A large metal claw comes crashing down toward Sonic, but doesn't get a chance to collide with him because Shadow appears and completely saws through the artificial limb. The arm falls inches away from Sonic and Shadow lands expertly in front of the blue hero a moment later.

Sonic has a smile plastered on his face when he sees Shadow, happy to see him no less. "Nice save, Shadow," Sonic compliments genuinely, "I owe you one."

"I'm not here to save you," Shadow informs him.

Sonic gives him a doubtful look, but takes a few steps forward so their almost shoulder-to-shoulder, "Of course not. Just like how you didn't clear a path for me to get into Eggman's base easier."

"I was following orders from the military," Shadow retaliates with a grim look, "Not helping a vigilante."

"Big words from someone who tried to take over the world," Sonic replies snottily.

"Stop fighting, you two. And take down Eggman," Tails interjects from behind the back wall.

Sonic looks up at Shadow with an accusing look, "Why is Tails here?"

Shadow doesn't answer because another metallic arm comes swinging down. It dents the floor, but the two hedgehogs dodge it easily. Shadow disappears behind a flash of green light and Sonic runs up the colossal robot arm.

Sonic smirks when he sees the doctor in the cockpit and spin dashes right at him. Except, the chest plate opens up and missiles take aim at the blue blur. He manages to hit the circular compartment and send the doctor flying from his death robot, but the missiles are about to hit. He closes his eyes and braces for imminent impact.

The impact doesn't occur because Shadow appears and scoops him up into his arms. They disappear behind a flash of green light and are back on the ground safely. Shadow gently places Sonic back onto his feet and takes a few steps forward, assessing their situation.

"Alright. So, that's... Shadow: two. Me: zip. I'll find some way to make it up to you," Sonic announces with his hands on his hips.

"Silence," Shadow demands and eyes the downed robot suspiciously. That was too easy. Even by the doctor's standards.

Shadow's communicator comes to life in his ear again with Rouge's voice, "Shadow, do you hear me? Omega is down! The GUN headquarters is being attacked! I don't know how this has happened... but... it..." The rest comes out a garbled mess.

"Rouge? Rouge, come in!" Shadow shouts, listening intently for any clues.

"Rouge?" Sonic asks when he sees Shadow's panicked expression, "What's up?"

Shadow places a finger in the air, indicating for Sonic to stop talking. He doesn't seem to be picking up anything for a long while until it comes back. Except this time, it's the doctor's voice.

"Ah, good. Just the hedgehog I wanted to talk to," Eggman says with a grin to his voice.

“Doctor?” Shadow asks with bewilderment.

Sonic seems surprised when he hears that. He rushes toward the robot and searches it. When he comes across the cockpit, he notices the decoy.

“I knew you couldn’t resist helping your little friends, Shadow,” Eggman goes on, “Don’t you love the irony of that? You were once alone in the world and the strongest you’ve ever been, and now they’re the thing that’s holding you back. I drew out the GUN agents one-by-one until the GUN base was practically defenseless. And with you and that blue menace out of the way, I was able to take control of every weapon and robot in the entire area.”

Shadow feels his lip curling into a snarl, “What’s the catch, doctor?”

“Straight to the point as always, Shadow,” Eggman says almost happily, “Bring me the last two Chaos Emeralds and I’ll let everyone go.”

“Not going to happen,” Shadow practically growls.

“No? But if you don’t batgirl will pay with her life,” Eggman states darkly.

It cuts over to Rouge screaming, “Don’t do it, Shadow!”

Shadow closes his eyes and cringes. It all reminds him of Maria and how he failed to save her. It was happening again. It was all happening again.

“So, what will it be?” Eggman asks with anticipation.

Shadow stays quiet for a long moment before finally opening his mouth, “Fine. Give me time.”

“No! No, don’t, Shad—“ Rouge’s voice gets cut off.

“It’s always a pleasure doing business with you, Shadow,” Eggman state with finality as the transmission ends.

Shadow stands in silence. When he hears the metallic footsteps coming up behind him, he knows it’s Sonic. He knows he’s waiting for him to explain himself, but he can’t. He knows Sonic won’t give him the emerald willingly. He clenches his fist and turns to Sonic and punches him.

Sonic doesn’t expect it for a second and is thrown back, tumbling onto the ground. Sonic reels in pain and shouts, “What the heck, Shadow!”

Shadow goes to step forward, but stops when he hears Tails.

“What are you doing, Shadow!? We aren’t your enemy!” Tails cries out and flies over to him. He lands between the two and holds his hands up like a barrier to stop Shadow, “Whatever is going on, we can talk it out!”

“Move,” Shadow orders sternly.

Sonic looks up at Tails anxiously, “Tails, get out of here! He’s not messing around!”

Shadow glares at Sonic. He sees his fear aimed at him. That’s all he’ll ever be. Something everyone fears. It’s what comes with being the most powerful being on the planet. He starts walking toward the fox boy and glaring down at him, “I’m giving you one last chance to move.”

Tails shakes his head, “I can’t do that.”

Shadow raises his hand, but stops. Tails shares a look with him and he can see the fox boy pulling his glove back to reveal a small device around his wrist. Shadow holds his stance when he sees the apologetic look on Tails' face.

"I didn't want it to come to this," Tails states before pressing the button.

Shadow freezes and feels his wrists and ankles seize. He can feel the power inside him draining into his ring inhibitors and they clang together like shackles. He falls on the ground with a thud as he desperately tries to struggle to pry his arms and legs apart, but it's no use. The energy inside him is being used to magnetize them together.

Shadow glares up at the two and seethes, "What is this?"

Sonic makes his way in front of Tails and guides him backwards, "Back up, buddy. I'll take care of this."

"I'm sorry, Shadow," Tails says as he backs up slowly.

Shadow turns his gaze up to Sonic now, staring into his eyes, "So, you were just waiting for me to turn on you."

"To be fair, I never thought we'd have to use it," Sonic states with a frown.

It still exists though. He knew he couldn't trust anyone. This is why he couldn't let anyone in. They only saw him as a threat. He closes his eyes mournfully and grits his teeth.

"Don't take it the wrong way. Let's just go back to the hero base and we'll talk. You can tell me what's going on," Sonic tries to explain calmly.

Shadow sees Sonic go to lift his hand to him and he nudges away. When Sonic tries again, Shadow lashes his face out and tries to bite him, "Go to *hell*, Sonic!" He feels completely and utterly betrayed.

Sonic just frowns and turns to Tails, "He isn't going to come quietly."

"Please, Shadow," Tails pleads with him.

"Do what you need to, but I'm not going with you without a fight," Shadow states stubbornly.

Tails looks away like it's too much to bear. He offers his wrist device over to Sonic and walks away with his face in his hands.

Sonic sighs and looks down at the device. "We don't want to do this, okay," Sonic explains as he lowers his voice. He kneels down on Shadow's level and softens his eyes, "You don't want to talk at the base? Fine. Talk to me now. What's going on?"

"That device is going to sedate me," Shadow points out with heated anger.

"Shadow..."

"No, do it. Just put my body in captivity again. I'm too much of a threat to live among fragile life forms like you," Shadow continues, feeling the rush of a challenge.

"You've helped me so much. I do notice everything you do for me and my friends. I know you care about us," Sonic says with a sad smile, "And it's kinda cool to be saved once in awhile. It's always been me saving everyone else. I rely on you a lot. I think we're both too stubborn to admit it, but we

need each other.”

“Cut the crap, Sonic,” Shadow grits out, struggling to move again, “Just admit it. You’re afraid of me. I’m nothing but a ticking time bomb to you. It’s only a matter of time until I turn on you and your pathetic friends. You will always have that underlining fear heavy on your soul.”

Sonic furrows his brow, “It isn’t like that at all.”

Shadow positions himself on his back and spits in Sonic’s face. He growls when he sees the anger shining in Sonic’s face, “We don’t trust each other. That’s final.”

“Maybe you’re right.”

The last thing Shadow sees is Sonic pressing the button and then blackness.

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Shadow opens his eyes slowly and tries to register what had happened. It takes him a minute to refocus his vision and when he does, he sees Knuckles sitting across from him on a chair. He’s in a plain room and he hears miscellaneous voices coming from down the hall. He still feels the weight of his limbs being held together, so he shimmies his body so he isn’t laying face-first into the mattress. He was on some sort of cot or something.

“You’re in the Freedom Fighter’s base,” Knuckles informs him like he can sense his confusion.

“Is that what you call your pathetic excuse of a team?” Shadow asks, trying not to sound too groggy. He’s failing miserably.

Knuckles doesn’t regard his comment, “We lost contact with Rouge yesterday. Sonic and Tails tell me you might know what happened.”

“My teammates are my problem,” Shadow mumbles bitterly, “You worry about your… freedom team or whatever.”

“Freedom Fighters,” Knuckles corrects, “and Rouge has worked with us plenty of times.”

“She’s a GUN agent and my partner,” Shadow states with a hiss, “That information is classified.”

Knuckles doesn’t like the word ‘partner.’ Why she trusts Shadow over them he’ll never understand. Knuckles stands up and walks over to the cot. He grabs Shadow by the head and tosses him onto his back. “Lives are on the line, Shadow. So, swallow your pride and just tell me. For Rouge’s sake,” Knuckles demands angrily, “Believe it or not, we want the same thing.”

Shadow lets a smirk graze his lips, “Do we? I’m glad you’ve finally realized your trash so you can take yourself out.”

“Why you…” Knuckles gives into his anger and goes to grab Shadow by the throat.

“Enough!” Sonic’s voice rings through the room as he’s standing in the doorway. He makes his way over to his short-tempered friend and guides his hand away from Shadow’s neck. He gives him a smile nonetheless, “Thanks for looking after him. I’ll take it from here, big guy.”

Knuckles turns away sharply with a grunt and walks away, “Good luck with him. You’ll need it.” With that, he leaves and shuts the door behind him.

“Try not to rile Knuckles up,” Sonic tells him a bit jokingly, “He takes things *way* too personally.”

"I would know about that," Shadow responds gesturing to his shackled wrists.

"There are worse places to be imprisoned. Trust me," Sonic says as he takes a seat on the mattress, "Prison Island wasn't exactly paradise. Despite the name."

Shadow growls and spins his body around. He kicks both his legs out in Sonic's direction. His movements are more sluggish than usual and Sonic blocks it easily. He makes a dissatisfied noise in response.

"I get it," Sonic says, his voice sounding strangely serious, "You're still mad at us."

"You have a device specifically created to detain me," Shadow states coldly.

"Yeah, we do," Sonic tells him in a clear voice, "and I'm sorry. The decisions you make do scare me. I asked Tails to make the device. So, if you're going to be mad at anyone, be mad at me." Sonic glances over at Shadow and he can see the seething rage from him. Which is fair. "I'm looking out for the safety of my friends. You're included in that package, Shadow. Sometimes I worry that your power is too strong for even yourself. I mean, you have inhibitor rings preventing you from being a bomb. And... that isn't your fault. You didn't choose to be created like that. I just don't want you hurting others or yourself."

"Touching," Shadow says with both mockery and anger.

"Come *on*, Shadow. I'm actually being real with you right now," Sonic responds with agitation.

"I've been doing fine for three years with you and your dumb adventures. And you decide *now* is the time to make something like that?" Shadow asks with a grim tone.

Sonic opens his mouth and then closes it. He cringes and rubs the back of his neck nervously.

"About that, Shadow. We made it awhile ago," Sonic explains cautiously, "Well... right after the Black Doom thing actually. I mean, that stuff got really insane. And he started controlling your mind like a queen bee or something. We had no way to..."

"I *handled* it," Shadow speaks through clenched teeth.

Sonic looks Shadow over. Then, looks away. He really seems like he wants to say something, but he keeps his mouth shut.

"What? Are you afraid of me? Afraid I'll turn on you and your friends. That I'll destroy everything you've made for yourself? Do I scare you that much that you need to hold me prisoner!?" Shadow asks, purposefully making himself more menacing with each word.

"No!" Sonic shouts, taking them both by surprise. He continues a bit softer, "No, I'm afraid I'm gunna to lose you."

Shadow's at a loss for words this time. He disregards Sonic's comment, but it does make him feel something. He can't put his finger on it, but something is there. It was awhile ago, but he had regained a memory. One of him feeling the gravity pulling him down as his energy drains away. Sonic above him reaching for him. Sonic's face. That look of anguish has haunted his dreams time and again. He still isn't sure if that memory is real or not.

"Listen, Shadow. I hate to be the guy that leaves you with an ultimatum, but you either tell us what you know or you're staying like this," Sonic says a bit defeated. He gets up and walks to the door, "And by the way, Tails was the only one who had that device. He's like a brother to me. He's been there since the beginning. Before I had anyone. If you've taught me anything, it's that I'm terrified of

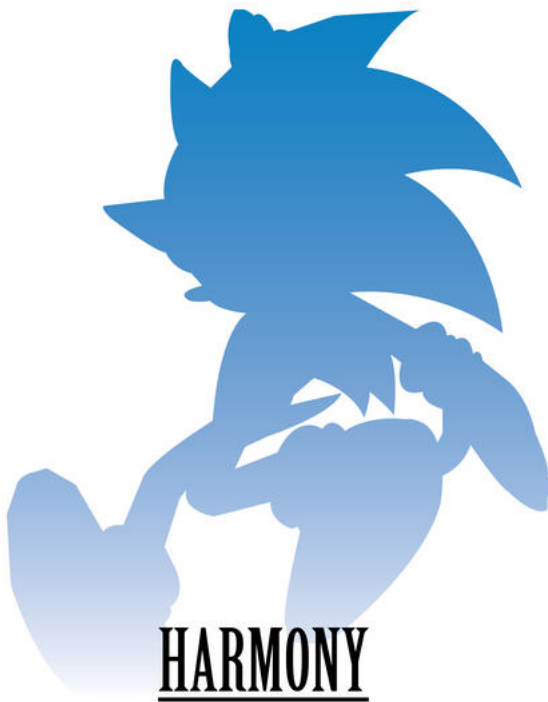
losing the ones I love because I'd probably handle it just as harshly as you." Sonic looks Shadow over once more before stepping out of the room.

Shadow frowns. His heart feels heavy in his chest. He rolls over to his side with his back facing the door. He was expecting an interrogation or a fight. He wasn't expecting to relive the past in the most gruesome way possible. He thinks about Sonic's words and he grimaces because he knows why he's looking out for Sonic on the sidelines and why he intervenes when he deems necessary. He's just as afraid of losing him.

Loved ones.

He's had those once and he has them now. It's so painful knowing he could lose them all again.

Melding Emotions



Chapter Two: Melding Emotions

No one visits the room until the next morning. There's a knock on the door and Cream walks in with a bowl of steaming oatmeal. She makes her way over to him and smiles, "I'm not sure if you're hungry, Mister Shadow, but I brought you some oatmeal. It's my mom's special recipe."

Shadow looks tired as he holds up his bound arms, indicating that he can't even eat it if he wanted to.

"That's okay," Cream says cheerfully as she pulls a chair over to him and sits down. She scoops a small portion onto the spoon and holds it up to him, "Say 'ah.'"

This was humiliating. There was no way. He turns his head away stubbornly. "Just get me Sonic," Shadow demands obdurately.

"Mister Sonic is out on a mission right now. He won't be back for a few hours," she informs him as she tries to guide the spoon closer to Shadow's mouth.

Shadow rolls his eyes and gives in. He opens his mouth and lets the rabbit girl feed him the oatmeal. At least no one else was in the room to see this.

"Please, don't be mad at Tails, Mister Shadow. I know he's very upset and worried that you might be mad at him, but he means well," Cream explains with sad glassy eyes.

This was literal torture. The last thing he needed right now was this. He swallows his spoonful and curls his lips, "If Tails wants to apologize, he can do it to my face."

She places a hand on her hip and frowns, “You shouldn’t be so mean. My mom says that it’s easier for people to approach you if you’re nice.”

Shadow gives her a bland look and turns so his back is facing her. He’s clearly done with all of this right now. Sonic’s friends were just too much for him. “Just let me know when Sonic gets here,” Shadow grumbles.

The rabbit girl sighs and nods even though she knows he can’t see her. She leaves with the unfinished bowl of oatmeal with her and shuts the door.

Laying here and doing nothing was absolute agony. If Sonic didn’t come back soon and release him he’ll probably go crazy.

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Four hours. Shadow has been laying there for *four hours*.

He’s also been laying there trying to pull his wrists free of his inhibitor rings. He doesn’t care of the repercussions at this point. He needs out.

The door finally swings open though and Sonic saunters his way inside, “Heard ya finally wanna talk.”

Shadow feels the anger inside him rising. He swings his body around with all his might and manages to leverage himself off the bed and onto his feet. The moment he goes to step forward, his whole body jerks and he’s falling on his face. He lets out an agitated noise.

Sonic is looking down at him with his brow raised, “Geez, Shadow. You sure have a lot of energy today.”

“Let me go! I can’t take it anymore!” Shadow shouts, digging his fingers into the ground.

Sonic grins down at him, knowing he’d break soon enough. He isn’t too mean to leave Shadow on the ground though. So, he helps him back up and into a sitting position on the bed. Sonic grabs the chair, flips it around, and sits on it backwards. He pillows his chin on his arms and smirks, “Ready to talk?”

Shadow is staring daggers at him. He has so much hatred for him right now. “If I talk, you need to promise me something,” Shadow says with a tight voice.

“I’m all for keeping promises,” Sonic replies with a pleased look as he holds his pinky out to him.

Shadow smacks it away with both his hands. Sonic’s sweetness is making him sick. “If you go, you have to promise to take me with and give me back my emerald,” Shadow says like he hates every syllable he’s uttering to him.

Sonic stifles a laugh, “I wouldn’t have it any other way, Shadow.”

Sonic’s stupid laugh makes his ears twitch. He wishes he could strangle him right now. He tries to keep it together though as he goes on, “The doctor infiltrated GUN HQ.”

Sonic nods like he knows.

“He’s... holding Rouge hostage. He says he’ll let her go if I give up the last two Chaos Emeralds,” Shadow explains with his head bowed.

Sonic shakes his head, “Shadow, you know we can’t make deals with Eggman. He never keeps them. We have to—“

“No,” Shadow practically growls, “I need to see to it that she makes it out alive. I can’t take any chances. I can’t let you and your sporadic behavior get in the way of this mission. I need to complete this transaction.”

Sonic folds his arms across his chest, “We can’t do that. He has five of the seven emeralds. If we give him the last two, who knows what he’ll do.”

“You’re a hypocrite,” Shadow bites at his words.

“Yeah? How so?” Sonic asks with a challenge to his voice.

He knows. He can tell by how Sonic reacted to having Tails at Eggman’s fortress. He remembers Sonic’s words the night prior. “Tails to you... Is Rouge to me,” Shadow finally says, wincing at his words as if he hates admitting them out loud.

Sonic just stares at Shadow for a long moment. His face is unreadable. The silence is deafening.

Luckily, just as Sonic always does, he comments with a lighthearted joke, “Boy, Knuckles is sure gunna be happy when he hears that.”

Shadow just gives him a confused look.

“Sorry. We were all taking bets on you being Rouge’s boyfriend,” Sonic snickers.

“This is serious, Sonic,” Shadow seethes as he looks at Sonic through his brow.

Sonic sighs and finally stands up. He pulls his glove back and presses the button on the device. He makes his way over to the doorway as the rings around Shadow’s wrists and ankles unfuse.

Shadow gasps when he feels the pressure lift off him and he rubs at his raw feeling around his wrists. He looks up at Sonic with a questioning look.

“Are you coming or what?” Sonic says with an impatient look.

Getting up, Shadow makes his way over to Sonic. He grits his teeth when he sees the smug look on his face. His hand snaps up and slams into the wall just beyond Sonic’s head. He leans in, getting into Sonic’s face like a looming storm cloud and whispers with tame ferocity, “The next time you bind me, might I suggest not antagonizing me. It won’t end well for you.”

Sonic shrinks back a little, but keeps a sheepish smile on his face, “I’ll take a mental note of that.”

Shadow holds his hand out to him and demands, “My emerald.”

“It’s with Tails,” Sonic replies and holds up his empty hands like evidence.

Shadow just remains where he is, staring into Sonic’s eyes. He studies his face, soaking in the dormant look of fear from him. It makes him feel both angry and powerful. Then, he sees something else. Sonic’s eyes blowing a bit and his emerald eyes big and bright. He leans in closer to get a better look and notices that they’re the same color of his emerald. It’s strange how he’s drawn to them a bit. Shadow’s hand slides away from the wall and he tears his gaze away from the other.

“Shadow?” Sonic asks, not moving like he’s afraid the action will cause the other to strike.

“I don’t know this base. You’re going to have to lead the way,” Shadow informs him with irritation.

“Right,” Sonic says with a bit of relief as he slides away from the wall and guides the other down the halls. They make their way to a computer room where Tails is typing away. “Hey, buddy. Shadow needs his emerald back,” Sonic announces.

Tails almost falls off his chair when he sees Shadow enter the room unbound. “R-right,” Tails says obediently as he gets up and presses a button to a hidden compartment. The mechanism opens and the emerald comes into view. He takes it and slowly walks up to Shadow, holding it out to him. He’s afraid to look at him or even speak.

Shadow eyes the emerald and then the fox kid. He remembers the rabbit girl’s words and sighs a bit reluctantly, “Thank...you.” He takes the emerald back into his possession and turns to the blue hero, “And the other?”

“Look,” Sonic starts to say.

Shadow doesn’t give him the chance, “The other one.”

Sonic holds a finger up to him, indicating for the other to give him a second. He pulls the device off his wrist and tosses it over to Tails. He leaves the room shortly after.

Shadow keeps to himself, waiting impatiently for Sonic to return.

Tails takes this time to try and explain himself, “I’m so sorry about what happened, Shadow. I’m sorry things went how they did...”

“People fear what’s stronger than them,” Shadow says bitterly, “I never expected any different from you so your apology is unneeded.”

Tails looks down with shame and rubs his arm.

Sonic is back in a flash and sees that the tension in the room is heavier than ever. He drapes an arm around Shadow’s shoulder and smirks, presenting the emerald to him, “Alright. Now that our shopping list is all checked off, we can get going.”

Shadow goes to grab the emerald, but Sonic pulls it away last minute, “Relax. I’ll hand it over when we get into GUN HQ. I’m sure the security is impossible to get through without warping in there.”

“Nothing is impossible for me. I’m the Ultimate Life Form,” Shadow states assertively.

“Yeah, well, I’m Sonic the Hedgehog and I need an emerald to get into HQ so...” Sonic states right after and guides them out of the exit. He waves Tails off and ignores the kid’s insistence on coming with.

“Not going to bring your little fox friend?” Shadow asks with a scowl.

“Nah. We’re gunna be in and out,” Sonic snaps his fingers and brushes him off.

Shadow rolls his eyes. Whatever. At least that horrid device isn’t going to be following him with this mission. When they get Rouge out of this mess, his first orders to her are going to be to disable that thing so he never has to worry about it again.

They warp to the GUN building and just as suspected, security is tight. Robotnik’s badniks are surrounding the place. Along with some overtaken GUN drones.

“Hm... Now, if I were a balding scientist with a horrible mustache where would I be?” Sonic asks in more of a mocking manner.

Shadow answers anyway, “My last transmission came from the central computer room on the basement floor. Although, it wouldn’t be wise to warp there directly. It could be a trap.”

“No, it’s definitely a trap,” Sonic says with a smirk, “It’s an open invitation for us.”

“Us?” Shadow sneers, “No, he’s expecting *me*.”

“Alright. I have a hunch you have an idea,” Sonic replies, leaning against the wall and waiting for a response with a half-lidded gaze.

Why is Sonic toying with him? And why does Shadow kind of like it? Perhaps it’s because Sonic is letting him have command. He doesn’t know how he feels about it.

He lowers his voice and explains, “I’ll warp us a few meters away and head into the computer room alone with both emeralds. You’ll stay back until I give you the signal.”

“Surprise attack. I like it,” Sonic compliments with a nod. He taps his finger to his lips thoughtfully and asks, “But what’s the signal?”

Shadow doesn’t say anything. Just cements a scowl onto his face and folds his arms across his chest.

Sonic finds himself laughing quietly, “Classic Shadow.”

Something burns in his chest when he hears the quiet laughter of his companion. It has a boyish charm to it and he’s disgusted with himself for liking it.

“Alright,” Sonic agrees as he holds his hand out for him, “Direct me where to go. I’ll follow your lead.”

“Now you trust me?” Shadow questions.

“Uh... Duh! If you would have just explained yourself...” Sonic can see Shadow’s glare sharpening with each word he says, “You know what? Never mind. Let’s do this!”

Shadow nods and takes his hand. He raises the emerald over his head and warps them inside. Once they’re in, Shadow looks up and down the hallway. He pushes Sonic down with him when he sees a laser sight and they stalk backwards into another room.

“That was a close one,” Sonic says a bit impressed that they dodged it.

Shadow lifts his hand to Sonic’s mouth and silences him. He gets in close and whispers, “Do not make a sound. Just follow my lead.”

Sonic can’t reply so he just gives him a thumbs up.

Shadow pulls his hand away and still feels the warmth on it. He pushes it out of his mind though because there are more important matters. Shadow looks up and down the hall once more and sees that the drone’s laser is facing the opposite way. He signals Sonic to follow and they creep down the way until they get to a corner. There’s a room at the end with a bunch of blinking lights. The computer room for sure. They quietly make their way down it and Shadow stops Sonic. He points to the ground ordering him to stay put.

Sonic just nods at him.

Shadow holds his hand out to him.

Sonic internally groans and forfeits his emerald. He looks into Shadow's eyes and mouths the words 'Good luck.'

He doesn't know why it throws him off, but it kind of does. Shadow looks away a bit stubbornly before nodding and heading in. He stands upright and walks into the room casually with both emeralds in hand as he announces, "Doctor, I've arrived with the emeralds you requested."

The room is quite dark, but just as he thinks that the lights turn on one-by-one. The evil scientist is lounging in a comfortable seat with a plethora of buttons around him. He folds his hands together and watches Shadow approach him with an evil grin, "Good work, Shadow. Although, it took you longer than expected."

"I ran into some trouble," Shadow replies, keeping a calm demeanor.

The doctor laughs and presses a button. A screen appears showing how Shadow was captured by Sonic and Tails. Eggman obviously finds it amusing. "It must *sting* knowing your friends would turn against you," Eggman remarks with a grin.

"They aren't my friends. It's pretty obvious," Shadow responds, not even having to fake his scowl.

"You know... I still respect you, Shadow. You were my grandfather's creation. We're practically family," Eggman explains with a menacing look, "Others are afraid of what they don't understand. But me? I see great potential for you. Why don't you join me and we'll take our revenge on that meddling hedgehog. Together."

Shadow appears to be thinking it over. Although, he's using the time to look around the room. He doesn't see Rouge anywhere in sight. "I might just take you up on that offer, doctor. This world won't ever see me as anything, but a weapon so why try to be anything else?" He begins to pace the room in hopes of finding some sort of clue and he stops when he sees a small light shining from the back room. He continues and begins pacing the opposite way, "I now realize that living by a promise of a weak girl I barely have any recollection of is pointless. Maria... her dreams to protect the Earth? The planet she couldn't even live upon because it was slowly killing her?" He turns to the doctor and holds the emeralds up for him and finishes, "If anything, it all sounds like a bad omen. A warning. The world will do the same to me if I don't detain it myself."

The doctor has a positively evil look on his face as he rubs his hands together. He walks around the control panel and makes his way over to Shadow, "I'm so glad you see it that way. As the strongest living thing in existence, it's only fair you rule over it all. It's survival for the strongest. This world was meant to be conquered."

Shadow nods and smirks, "And I have you to thank, doctor. You were the only one who didn't fear me. The one who released me from my prison. I would be honored to rule by your side."

"Don't do it, Shadow!"

Shadow's eyes widen when he hears Sonic's voice. His blood runs cold when he sees the blue hero standing in the doorway. He glares at him, wishing he could silently signal for him to get out of there without blowing the whole charade.

"Why, if it isn't the blue rat himself," the doctor states with a smug look. He turns to Shadow and gives him the order, "Take him down and we'll start preparations immediately."

Shadow feels his fingers tighten around the emeralds in his hands. This was the opposite of what he

wanted. Sonic could never comprehend the idea of stealth even if it hit him in the face. “Very well,” Shadow states, not even faking his anger. He slowly marches over to Sonic, giving him plenty of time to flee but the other isn’t budging. Shadow’s eyes widen when he sees the guilt in Sonic’s eyes.

“Look, Shadow. I’m sorry. What I did was wrong. And maybe I should have trusted you more to take care of the situation on your own, but I care about you. Don’t think I don’t. Don’t side with Eggman over something stupid I did,” Sonic says and he actually sound very apologetic about it. Nothing was masking it. No jokes or antagonizing remarks. Just complete and genuine remorse. “I’m the leader. Everyone is depending on me. If I don’t keep up this front that nothing ever bothers me then people start losing hope. I guess, I just need to learn to rely on others more. I need to learn to rely on *you* more.”

“Aw, that’s sweet,” Eggman scoffs, “What a touching speech. Too bad it’ll be your last!”

Sonic just watches Shadow approaching him and he holds his hand out, “Please, Shadow.”

Shadow looks down at Sonic’s hand. He wishes he was hearing Sonic’s words on different terms because it felt like he was looking at Sonic, the real Sonic, for the first time. And he isn’t just a cocky, antagonizing moron but a humble, caring guy. Then again, he isn’t sure if he wants to see Sonic in that light.

Shadow winces and lashes forward. He shoves his green emerald in Sonic’s hand and grabs his arm roughly and throws him over his shoulder. He watches the blue hedgehog fly into the back room where he knows Rouge is being held at. He just hopes Sonic is smart enough to know to rescue her and use Chaos Control to transport her out of here.

The doctor looks ecstatic to see his foe flying across the room. It was so quick, he doesn’t even realize the emerald is gone.

Shadow stands with his back to the doctor, holding the other emerald he has in his hand. He’s buying time. He waits silently. Relief washes over him when he sees the green flash of light from the back room and he knows the mission is complete. It wasn’t how he wanted it to go, but he’ll take it.

He slowly turns around to reveal that he’s only holding one of the emeralds as he announces, “I’m sorry, doctor. I work for no one.”

Eggman pales, “You traitor! You’ll pay for this insolence with your life!” The scientist presses the self destruct button and another button as a shuttle appears around him.

“Chaos...” Shadow gets ready, but stops when he sees the familiar green light next to him. Sonic appears beside to him in an instant. “Get out of here!” Shadow shouts at him.

Eggman’s shuttle launches and he gets away. The countdown starts and they only have five seconds before the bomb goes off.

Shadow grabs Sonic by the waist and initiates Chaos Control once more. They head up towards the top of the base and the explosions are following after them. Something’s wrong though. Shadow’s energy is draining much faster than it would usually. He curses to himself because it’s probably the cause of that damn device that was restraining him for so long.

Sonic sees this and takes over, warping them onto a higher level and buying some more time. The building around them is exploding and crumbling apart. They have no choice, but to keep making their way up by launching themselves off of metal beams and debris.

“Where is Rouge?” Shadow shouts over to Sonic as he jumps from level to crumbling level of the

building.

“Safe! She’s nowhere near the building, but I used up most of my chaos energy to come back,” Sonic informs him, following close behind.

“Idiot! Why did you come back,” Shadow asks as the anger eats at his chest, “And why didn’t you wait for my damn signal like I told you to?”

Before Sonic can answer, smoldering rubble rains down on them and he grabs Shadow by the waist. They slam into the wall of the building and watch as the debris falls into the fiery explosions below them. “I came back because I needed to make sure you were okay! How was I supposed to know you weren’t being serious about all that stuff? You sounded really convincing,” Sonic retaliates.

Shadow scowls and tosses Sonic upwards and they continue their climb up the building. “Well, because of you the doctor got away and the entire GUN HQ is getting demolished,” Shadow replies heatedly, “Do you ever *think* about what you do before you do it?”

“No, I rely on instinct. Tails does most of the thinking,” Sonic responds with a laugh.

That sets Shadow off. He sends a punch at Sonic and watches him fly into the ceiling above them. He tackles him and uses the little bit of chaos energy he has and warps them up to the next level.

Sonic winces and kicks Shadow off him, “Are you trying to save me or kill me?”

“A little bit of both,” Shadow responds through gritted teeth, “You’re infuriating. How does anyone follow a moronic leader like you?”

“With how many teammates I have, I must be doing something right. I can’t say the same for you,” Sonic says back. He speeds up the wall, rolls into a ball, and smashes into Shadow.

Shadow falters back a little and feels the rumble under his feet. They’re far enough away from the explosion, but the support of the building was on its last legs. It was coming down. He glares at Sonic and tackles him out the window. Their bodies freefall as shattered glass glistens around them.

Sonic kicks Shadow off him, but his back collides with a chunk of falling cement. He loses consciousness for a moment and when his vision kicks back in all he can see is Shadow descending down on him like a dart. He braces himself, but he feels himself getting grabbed instead. When he opens his eyes again, all he can see is rubble above them blocking out the sky. They were going to be buried and crushed.

When Shadow sees the ground coming up from under his feet, he just barely breaks the fall by hovering with his shoes. They land a bit roughly, but they land nonetheless. Shadow sees the debris above them and pushes Sonic into a wall of already fallen concrete. He stands over him and takes a few hits from the rumble.

When he opens his eyes, he gives Sonic a desperate look. He places both emeralds in Sonic’s hands and presses their palms together, “Give me the rest of your power, Sonic.”

“What?” Sonic asks in confusion, but does what he’s told when he sees the building about to collapse on top of them.

“Chaos Blast!” Shadow cries out as an explosion of chaos energy erupts around their bodies. It’s way too much power all at once and it’s tearing itself out of his body, but he holds on because he knows they’ll die if he doesn’t.

Sonic just wonders what's happening, why the blast isn't effecting him, and how Shadow is pulling it off. He looks at Shadow's wrists and sees that his ring inhibitors are missing. He watches overhead as the building slowly burying them under it, but they remain cocooned and untouched.

The energy starts to slowly flicker away and the two are left staring at one another in disbelief. They survived that. Sonic drops the emeralds and helps Shadow slide his inhibitors back on. It doesn't really occur to them that they're trapped under the rubble, but they're *alive*.

Sonic can feel Shadow's chest heaving over his and his is doing the same. He can feel the short, hot breaths against his face from their panting. "Shadow..." Sonic whispers between labored breaths.

Shadow presses his body closer to Sonic's and he sees Sonic's leg lift up to brace against the wall of rubble behind him. They moan in unison at the contact, but are both very confused about what's happening between them.

Shadow's earpiece comes to life in a fit of static, "Shadow...! Are you... 'kay? Shadow?" He's relieved to hear Rouge's voice.

"Yes," he responds back between gasps of air. He vaguely knows she's there because even with the limited amount of light, he's losing himself within the depths of Sonic's eyes. What's happening to him? What is this blue hedgehog doing to him?

Sonic gently nuzzles his face into Shadow's and his panting is so clear in his ear now. It's a hot, wet sound and it's driving him crazy. His fingers slide together with Sonic's and he squeezes roughly, fighting with himself.

Sonic should have stayed back. He should have listened to him. Shadow should have never seen that caring side of him. He never wanted to know it. He never wanted to know that side of him. It was easier to hate the cocky, arrogant side of him. Because now...

Sonic lets out a surprised choked noise. One Shadow's heard him make from punching him in the gut, but that isn't the case this time. This time, it's from him pushing inside his intense heat. Shadow tries to blink the fuzziness from his vision, but he can't help it. It feels so *good*. Sonic feels so good.

"Shadow... where... you?" Rouge's voice hits his ear again.

Shadow swallows and tries to hold it together, "A...a minute. Give me a minute."

"How... Shadow... coming to save you," the transmission cuts in again.

Shadow's hips snap forward and he gets that wonderful sound back into his ear, cutting out all the annoying static. Vocal and real. He feels Sonic pull back and he's looking down at Shadow with disbelief as his face melts into complete ecstasy.

Sonic's fingers squeeze harder and his breathing gets more labored. He nods to Shadow with encouragement.

It all felt so surreal, but well contained. He keeps going, moving his hips in a smoother, regular manner. Riding the waves of these emotions. He can't believe Sonic wants this. He can't believe it's happening either. He doesn't even care right now. He's drowning in bliss.

"Shadow...! You... 'kay? What's happen...?" Rouge's voice comes back into his ear.

Shadow growls angrily and snaps his hips harder, "Give me a *damn* minute!" He gasps when he feels Sonic's leg curl around his back and reel him in closer. Their bodies move in unison and he can

feel Sonic's muscles quivering around him.

Sonic throws his head back and moans loudly like he can't contain himself any longer. It's a gorgeous sound and Shadow drinks it up.

"Shadow...?!" Rouge's voice hits him one more time.

Shadow clenches his teeth and grits out, "I have to go." He pulls it off his ear and tosses it to the ground. He might have stepped on it as he readjusts his stance, but he really couldn't care less. Sonic is absolutely losing himself and that's all he really cares about right now. One of Shadow's hands leaves Sonic's and he grips his hip, thrusting in harder and then holding. His teeth graze at Sonic's shoulder, stifling his own voice so he can listen solely to Sonic, and feels his release wash over him.

They're both left panting and wondering what just happened. It was so insane and out of the blue, but at the same time wishing it had happened sooner. Shadow pulls back a little and feels Sonic's body collapse into his arms. Completely spent.

Shadow leans down and grabs the Chaos Emeralds from the ground. He manages to use what little power he has left and warp them out. Sonic is still hanging on his arm and Shadow falls down to his knees. His exhausted eyes look around and see the destruction around them. The GUN building was completely destroyed, but they were safe for now.

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The 'Freedom Fighters' are understandably angry with them when they return hours later. They hadn't tried to get any kind of contact before arriving. Shadow didn't want it and Sonic had passed out for two of those hours. Everyone is asking what happened and neither really give a straight answer.

Rouge even tries to talk to Shadow alone, but he doesn't want to talk. He wants to be alone, but his only home was GUN and it was destroyed so he doesn't have anywhere else to go. He doesn't want to think about moving back in with Rouge and her night club. This was so embarrassing. Everything was so embarrassing.

Sonic's face flashes back into his mind and he feels a little ill. What the hell did he do? Why did he do that? What was that?

Shadow catches the slight glance Sonic gives him from across the room and has to leave. He doesn't know where he's going, but he can't be around everyone anymore. He can sense the small rabbit girl following him though.

"I can see you back to your room, Mister Shadow," she tells him with a smile.

He looks like he's going to protest, but stops. He just grunts in agreement and follows after her. When he gets into the room, he closes the door behind him and just leans against it. He clenches his eyes shut when he remembers everything that had just happened and wishes he could forget. He wishes so badly he could forget this.

Shadow loses sense of time and doesn't know how much of it has passed when he hears Rouge open the door. He just glances up at her with a broken look before looking away, "If you're here to give me some kind of snarky remark, I'd rather you just leave me be."

She gives him a concerned look. She knows something is wrong. She's used to him being glum, but this is something completely different. She walks over to him and offers a smile, "Actually, I just wanted to say thank you for saving me."

He just nods, but doesn't look her in the eye.

"I heard you barely made it out of there alive," she tells him, "You've had some close calls before, but none of those have left you so down in the dumps before."

"Sonic..." Shadow mumbles and grips his arms tightly.

Rouge frowns, "You almost lost Sonic."

"No, well... yeah, but... it..." Shadow buries his face in his palms. He can't say it. How could he explain it to anyone? "There's a feeling that's tearing me up inside," Shadow hisses like he can feel the pain in his chest.

Rouge sighs and takes a seat next to him. She wraps an arm around his shoulder and pulls him in closer, "It's complicated, huh?"

"Complicated?" Shadow replies with a grimace, "It's *agony*, Rouge. It all started with fulfilling a promise to Maria. I cross paths with this... imposter and find out that he isn't fake. He's real. The most real thing I've ever come across. So real *I've* mistaken him for the Ultimate Life Form. And then... I find out Maria's purpose is for me to protect the planet, but he's already doing so. I thought my promise meant nothing until I realized that every living thing relies on him and maybe my purpose is to protect him. And then..." Shadow grits his teeth angrily and buries his face into his partner's shoulder in shame.

"Oh, hon..." Rouge says soothingly as she rubs his back, "It'll be alright."

"I don't know anymore," Shadow says with anger and confusion, "What if this no longer has anything to do with my promise to Maria."

Rouge looks down at him with slight shock, "What do you mean?"

Shadow lets out an irritated noise and pulls himself away from her. He rolls over onto his side and buries his face into the pillow. Suddenly, being captured and sedated his whole life doesn't seem like such a bad idea anymore.

"Have you developed feelings for Sonic?" Rouge asks finally like she had just connected the dots.

Shadow's fingers dig into the pillow below him and he bites around each syllable as he says, "I. *Can't.*"

"It's not a choice," she informs him.

"He and his fox friend made a device that can turn my ring inhibitors into shackles," Shadow growls lifting his head from the pillow.

Rouge just blinks at him like she doesn't believe him. When his face doesn't budge, she looks horrified, "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, find a way to disable it," Shadow demands before shoving his face back into the pillow.

"That should be no problem at all, but..." Rouge goes on, but she can tell Shadow doesn't want to talk anymore. She doesn't blame him either. There must be a whirlwind of emotions happening in his head right now. She just pats him on the back before getting up and tells him, "I just want you to know that I'd never judge you, okay Shadow? Just know I'll be on your side no matter what."

Shadow lifts his head partially off the pillow and looks up at her. She's the one person that knows everything about him. All of his history. His past. She's even kept it a secret. Most of it anyway. He trusts her and he's so fortunate to have her. Rouge has really become the older sister he's needed ever since Maria. "Thank you," Shadow whispers quietly.

She hears it and she knows he's grateful. She smiles before walking out and closing the door lightly behind her.

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Cream comes bouncing in the room not long later asking if he wants to go outside with her. He wonders if Rouge put her up to this, but he agrees anyway. He's sick of being holed up in that room.

He follows her outside and they sit in the grass overlooking the ocean. Admittedly, the fresh air feels nice against his face and the grass is soft. He slowly opens his eyes when he feels a small weight in his lap and when he looks down he sees the dark chocolate chao sitting there.

"When I'm sad I like to hug Cheese to make me feel better," she tells him with a smile as she hugs her blue chao, "You can try it if you want. Chocola is friendly."

Shadow looks her over before looking down at the small creature in front of him. He hesitantly lifts his hand up to pet it's head and his face softens when he hears the baby-like babble coming from it.

Cream giggles and tells him, "I think he likes you."

Shadow doesn't say anything in response. He just pets it again when it nuzzles into his palm.

"Beautiful day, huh?"

Shadow's hand stops and his body stiffens. He suddenly wants to be as far away from here as possible.

The grass rustles next to him and he can see the signature blue appear in the side of his vision, "Think I can talk to Shadow alone for a bit, Cream?"

The rabbit girl nods cheerfully, "Of course, Mister Sonic. You can keep Chocola with you for now if you'd like, Mister Shadow." She doesn't give him much of a choice as she gets up and skips back into the base.

It's chillingly silent between them after Cream leaves. Shadow doesn't regard Sonic and continues to pet the chao in his lap while he stares out at the horizon.

Sonic is tapping his fingers together nervously like he's trying to figure out what to say. Sonic turns his head and Shadow can tell that he's looking at him now. He can't bring himself to look back. "We can pretend like none of that happened if you want," Sonic finally says. When Shadow doesn't respond to that, he starts rambling a bit, "It'll stay between us. I won't tell anyone. I could tell it was a heat of the moment kind of thing anyway and..."

"Can you shut up, please," Shadow grits out in a voice that's pleading for him to stop.

Sonic's face drops. He swallows and looks a little lost, "I can leave."

Shadow sighs. He reaches for Sonic's hand and turns his head away. He feels Sonic knit their fingers together and warmth blooms to life in Shadow's chest. This feels nice, but awfully wrong at the same time.

"I don't know how I feel about this yet," Shadow admits quietly.

"That's alright," Sonic replies with a relieved laugh. When it's silent again, he can't help but speak, "I didn't know you were living at GUN HQ. You shoulda told me. We would have found you a better place to stay."

Shadow pulls his knees closer to his chest, not exactly hugging the chao but close enough. He gives the ground a hard stare, "I don't want your pity."

"It isn't pity. With how many times you've saved the world the government should be giving you a place to stay," Sonic explains with amusement.

"I didn't own much. I didn't mind. It was more convenient," Shadow says simply.

"Shadow..." Sonic's voice is sad and worried.

Shadow lifts his hand to his chest and feels his heart beating faster. Every time Sonic says his name it triggers something inside him.

"Come live with me and Tails. I can tell you're uncomfortable here. Besides, it's away from the city and out in the open. So, if you feel like leaving and getting away from everyone there's plenty of room for it," Sonic suggests with a lighthearted tone.

"I need to find Omega before figuring out a living situation," Shadow responds bitterly.

"That's fine. And when we find him, if he needs any repairs, Tails can take a look at him," Sonic explains with a smile. His smile falls a little when he doesn't see Shadow's face change. He kicks his feet out and collapses back, pillowing his head on his arm. His mind goes back to everything that happened and he smiles softly, "I appreciate the save. I woulda been a goner without you. You really have a handle on the power of the Chaos Emeralds."

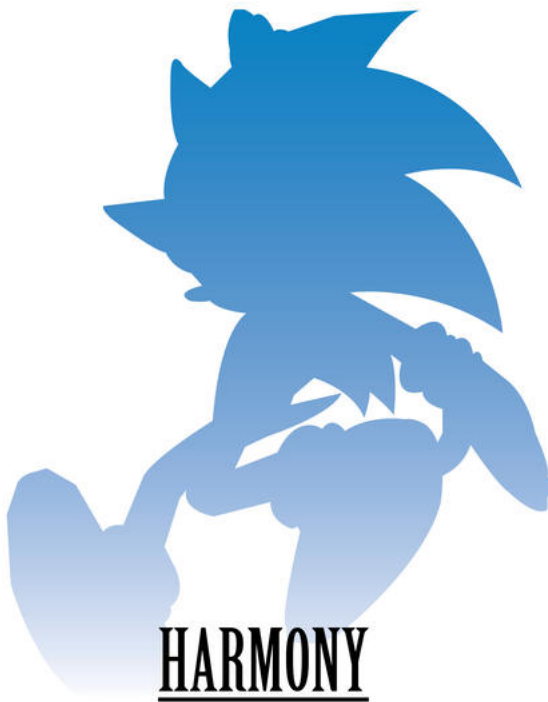
"You're important," Shadow says without second thought. His brow furrows when he thinks about it and adds, "...to the planet. You're important to the planet."

"So are you," Sonic says with a laugh.

They sit in silence, but it's a bit more comfortable this time. The tension is gone and Shadow is actually enjoying the other's company. He looks down at their hands together and then over at Sonic. The hero's eyes are closed with a peaceful smile on his face. He admires it for a long moment before looking back out at the ocean. At the tides rising and falling and glittering against the sunlight.

It really was a beautiful day.

Healing



Chapter Three: Healing

Shadow hates sitting back and doing nothing, but whatever that device did to him and his inhibitors force him to rest for a few days in order to regain his strength. So much for being the Ultimate Life Form. He probably wouldn't comply to this, but the 'Freedom Fighters' are taking shifts clearing the rubble and looking for Omega. So, he's not missing much besides participating in search parties and clean up duty.

Rouge enters the room with a smirk on her face.

Shadow pulls himself up a bit and asks, "Any sign of Omega?"

She shakes her head, "Not yet. Don't worry too much about him. Omega is as durable as a tank."

She's right. Even if the robot is offline, he's sturdy. The doctor actually made a proper weapon when he made Omega. He just lays back down and frowns. Omega might be just a robot, but he does understand him. And being one of his only nonliving companions, he'll probably stick with him long into the future.

"But I did find this," Rouge continues as she slips the wrist device out of hiding and dangles it in front of Shadow's face, "It was already disabled when I found it."

"Really?" Shadow asks in astonishment. He takes it and looks it over. It was true. It was off and if Rouge didn't shut it off someone else must have.

“You look relieved,” she states with some contained happiness of her own.

“Yeah...” Shadow says as the anxiety that had been building in his chest for days finally settles. He slides the device under the pillow and gives her an appreciative look, “Thank you for looking into that.”

“Of course, hon,” she responds with a wink, “So, how’s Romeo?”

Shadow gives her a disgusted look, “Depends. Should I poison or stab myself?”

Rouge finds herself laughing a little at his dark humor. She’s probably the only one who would laugh at the morbidity of it.

“To answer your question though, we’ve been avoiding each other. I’m thankful because I don’t have many words,” Shadow explains softly.

“When do you have words?” She says as she rolls her eyes.

“With you,” Shadow points out with a sigh, “I talk to you more than anyone else. You annoy me the least.”

“Charming,” Rouge says sarcastically, but she’s still snickering at it, “Although, you always tend to open your mouth when Sonic is around too.”

“Petty bickering hardly counts as words,” Shadow replies with exasperation.

“My little Shadow is growing up. I never thought I’d see the day you’d be reduced to a lovesick puppy,” she teases him.

“It isn’t lovesick. It’s just *sick*,” he stipulates with a distasteful look, “And stop insinuating things that aren’t real.”

“What is it with boys and not admitting their feelings?” Rouge shakes her head in defeat.

“Just get out so I can get some rest. The sooner I’m off this bed the better,” Shadow says gruffly as he rolls over so his back is facing her.

“Yes, my liege,” Rouge teases, even going so far as to bow to him. She does respect his wishes though and leaves.

Shadow lets the word lovesick run through his mind. No, he wasn’t that bad. He forces his eyes shut and slips his hand under his pillow. He stops when he feels the device and pulls it out once more. He does manage to smile down at it. It was nice to know that it was off now. The only one he could see giving the orders to do so is Sonic. So, he’s more than relieved.

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When Shadow opens his eyes and feels like his strength has fully returned, he leaves the base. And it’s like Rouge can sense he’s leaving too because she meets with him the moment he steps outside. The two head off into the city in search for their fallen comrade.

They start at the rendezvous point Shadow was supposed to meet Omega days prior. They don’t expect to find anything, but it’s the only lead they have.

Shadow gives the area a grim look. Nothing. Not even signs of a struggle. Omega must not have made it here.

“It’s okay,” Rouge reassure him, “We’ll keep searching. He’s got to be around here somewhere.”

Shadow nods to her. He stands and waits for Rouge because she seems to be tapping at a device on her wrist. His mind starts to wander as he notices just how blue the sky is today. He usually isn’t drawn to it, but...

“Watch out!” Rouge shouts suddenly and tackles Shadow down to the ground. The pavement starts to chip as a spray of bullets cracks at it.

Shadow grabs Rouge and uses Chaos Control to get them out of immediate danger. They reappear on top of one of the buildings and Shadow’s nerves are rattled. He couldn’t believe that happened. He wasn’t paying attention and it almost got them killed.

“Are you okay?” Rouge asks when she sees how distraught Shadow looks.

Shadow just nods and tries to knock his focus off something other than complete shock. He stands up and looks down at the spot they were standing just moments before. He hears familiar robotic noises and he can’t believe it when he sees Omega slowly walking up to the damaged roadway.

He hears Rouge gasp next to him and whisper, “It’s Omega.”

It was.

He must have been reprogrammed to hunt him down. If Shadow had to guess he’d say by the doctor himself. What a cheap trick.

Shadow stands upright and gazes down at his robot companion. Even if there was some kind of mind control put on him, Shadow knows he was built with a consciousness. He just needs to remind Omega who he is.

“I’m going to talk to him,” Shadow announces to Rouge.

“Are you crazy?” She asks with wide eyes, “He just shot at us.”

“I know,” Shadow states with a frown, “but he might still be in there somewhere. If I can’t get him back that way, you need to find a way to power him down while I create a diversion.”

This seems to calm her down a bit. At least it was a pretty solid plan. She just nods in agreement.

They head off in different directions and Shadow reappears in front of Omega. He holds his arms out and makes sure nothing about his body language is intimidating, “Omega.”

The robot immediately locks onto him and starts shooting. Luckily, Shadow is prepared for it and disappears and reappears behind him. “Listen to my voice, Omega. I’m Shadow. Do you remember me?” Shadow asks as calmly as he can.

Omega doesn’t move. The whirling of mechanical parts are heard as he processes the information. His voice module comes on, but all that comes out is a garbled mess of noises. There was no doubt about it. He was corrupted somehow. He turns back to Shadow, his movements more jerky than before.

“I am Shadow the Hedgehog,” Shadow says a bit slower for him, “You are E-123 Omega. You were created by Doctor Robotnik as the last of the E-series robots.”

Omega’s eyes flicker a bit and the whirling sounds get louder. He lifts his arm up to take aim for

Shadow, but stops and jerks down again. “O-meg-a,” the robot voices slowly.

“Yes,” Shadow confirms with a nod, “You’re Omega. You don’t work for the doctor anymore. You work for GUN with Rouge and I.”

“Shadow...” Omega pronounces sluggishly, “...Rouge.”

Shadow feels relief wash over him. He takes a step forward and continues, “Something is wrong with you. You’re malfunctioning. I will help you, but you need to disarm yourself first. Do you think you can do that?”

Omega looks down at his arm that’s currently shaped like an automated weapon. He looks back up at Shadow and is still. He doesn’t move as he says, “Processing... Processing... Processing...”

A small smile appears on Shadow’s face when he hears those words. Maybe he was automatically reprogramming himself.

Shadow looks taken aback when Omega finally states, “Negative.” He raises his arm at Shadow once more, “Shadow. The Ultimate Life Form. Threat level: High. Kill on sight.”

Shadow readies himself for a fight. He didn’t want it to go down like this, but he didn’t have a choice. More bullets spray at him and Shadow dodges them. His shoes ignite to life when he sees Omega’s breastplates open, sending heat seeking missiles his way. He has to jump and dodge them, but misjudges his jump as one hits him hard. He falls to the ground, but gets back up without delay.

“I’m not a threat to you, Omega,” Shadow says, trying to reason with him, “I’d never hurt you.”

Omega is in the process of reloading when his movements jerk to a stop again. The garbled mechanical sounds comes from his voice box once more and Shadow swears he hears distorted screaming. It sends a chill up his spine.

“It’s okay, Omega,” Shadow explains to him, “I understand. You’re malfunctioning. This isn’t you. Just... take a second and think. Remember who you are.”

“O-Omega,” the robot states again a bit more calmly. His joints creek like he’s trying to keep them still. Just as it looks like he’s finally calming down, all of his weapons fire at once. The missiles shoot in the sky and explode with a fiery impact.

Shadow has to use Chaos Control in order to get out of the line of fire, but just as he reappears more missiles are headed his way. He jumps, rolls, and dodges them, watching as they destroy the buildings around them.

This wasn’t good. He needed to transport Omega somewhere less populated. Somewhere he wouldn’t cause so much damage.

Just as he thinks that, he sees Rouge flying down to Omega. She dodges the bullets and has a determined look on her face as she gets in close. She just doesn’t expect Omega’s quick reaction time as he swings his large, metallic arm up and knocking her to the ground.

Shadow feels his heart stop. His shoes burst to life again as he rushes in. He receives minor nicks as bullet graze his skin, but he’s more worried about his companion. He gasps when he sees the missile though. He goes to teleport himself closer, but only manages to appear as it explodes. The force from the explosion toss both him and Rouge into the air. Shadow grits his teeth, uses his shoes to hover, and grabs her. He teleports them a few feet away and they tumble to the ground.

Shadow gets up immediately and looks down at her, "Rouge? Rouge!?"

She's unresponsive. She's just laying limply in his arms.

This couldn't be happening. This couldn't be real.

Shadow looks over at Omega who is smoking and sparking. He can tell Omega is desperately trying to power himself down right now. Shadow just cradles Rouge's body closer in his arms.

"Oh, hell no!" A flash of red comes barreling into the scene as Knuckles rushes in with his fists bared.

Shadow grits his teeth. Why? Why now? He reluctantly places Rouge gently on the ground and runs after him. Before Knuckles' fist can collide with Omega, Shadow pushes him away.

Knuckles wobbles on his feet a little before getting back into a powerful stance, "What is your problem, Shadow!? That thing attacked Rouge!"

"Omega isn't a thing," Shadow seethes out, "He's our teammate."

"What teammate attacks their own!?" Knuckles shouts and thrusts his fist in the direction of the malfunctioning machine, "He needs to be stopped!"

"That's what I was trying to do before you got here," Shadow informs him heatedly.

"Well, you're doing a piss poor job," Knuckles retaliates, "And if you get in my way, I'll take you down too!"

"So be it," Shadow growls.

The moment Knuckles goes to attack Omega again, Shadow stops him. He deflects Knuckles' punches with his homing attack. When Knuckles pushes him back, he skids across the ground and continues.

"Shadow, stop," the robot speaks through all the distorted feedback, "Shadow, stop."

Shadow shakes his head, "No!" He's not giving up on Omega. Not to this hotheaded buffoon. He'll never understand why these heroes are so stupid and impulsive. He can't give up on Omega. He knows what it's like when the world gave up on him. When he lost his way. He knows what it's like to have his mind manipulated. He doesn't want Omega to be going through that alone. He knows how it feels.

Knuckles means business though and sends a devastating uppercut to Shadow's face. Shadow's only down for a minute, but it's enough for Knuckles' fists to start tearing into Omega's body. Shadow gets back up and kicks Knuckles away with all the force his hover shoes can gather.

Knuckles hits the ground and gives Shadow an angry scowl. He doesn't come after Shadow though. Instead, he digs his way into the ground and disappears. Moments later, Knuckles emerges from the ground, fist first under Omega and completely tears a hole through him. As Knuckles lands on the ground, the robot's eyes flicker off and he falls to the ground motionless.

With complete shock and horror, Shadow watches him go down. Omega was dented, mangled, and ruined. That shock turns into heated rage though as he charges at Knuckles. He tackles Knuckles to the ground and bashes his fists into his face. Knuckles is fighting back and punching him in return, but Shadow doesn't even register it. He's too irate.

Shadow doesn't even realize he's being pulled away until he's not hitting Knuckles' stupid face anymore. When that revelation kicks in, he just lets out an angry wail and turns to whoever is pulling him away. When he sees Sonic's face though, he stops and his body feels like lead. He collapses on the ground and hangs his head in shame.

Knuckles is up and rubbing his sore face before shouting at Sonic, "Do something with him! He's crazy! He got Rouge hurt and then turned on me!"

Sonic looks around at the damage. He sees Rouge laying motionless on the ground and then sees Omega's sparking robotic remains. Sonic turns back to Shadow and tries to make eye contact with him, "Shadow, talk to me."

Shadow pushes away from him and shakes his head. He can't look at him. He knows what this looks like and he knows Sonic won't believe him over his friends. He gets up and darts off before disappearing behind a flash of light.

Sonic reaches out to stop him, but it's too late. Shadow is gone.

-

Shadow finds himself at the pier, staring down at the rising and falling water below him. He watches tiredly as the waves just barely lick at the bottoms of his shoes as everything replays in his head. His mission was to retrieve Omega, but instead he got both his teammates hurt.

He knows the sun is going down, but he has nowhere else to go and he doesn't want to show his face to anyone. He's more than ashamed of himself.

"There you are. I've been looking everywhere for you."

Shadow's head snaps up and it isn't long until he sees Sonic sitting down next to him, "How did you find me?"

Sonic just shrugs. He has two chili dogs in his hands and offers one to Shadow, "I just started looking in the least populated parts of the city."

Shadow tries to turn down Sonic's offer, but Sonic places the food item in Shadow's hands anyway.

Sonic sits back and smiles out at the sunset as he takes a bite of his chilidog. He's calm and relaxed and there is no tension between them at all. Shadow's very confused by this.

"I attacked your friend," Shadow points out as if Sonic wasn't aware of it.

Sonic swallows before replying, "Knuckles attacked yours. I could see why you were upset."

Shadow shakes his head, "I don't think you could ever understand why I'm upset."

Sonic takes another bite and uses the time it takes him to chew it to look over Shadow. When he gulps it down, he raises an eyebrow, "Okay. Fair enough, but I'll never understand if you don't talk to me."

Shadow glares down at the waves under his feet and explains, "I'm the Ultimate Life Form. I am supposed to be perfect. I'm not supposed to be making trivial mistakes like I had. I was supposed to have control over the situation and I failed. I failed at the only thing I was made for... and I failed my friends."

Something shines in Sonic's eyes when he hears the word 'friends' come out of Shadow's mouth. He's never heard Shadow refer to his teammates in that way before. It was refreshing. "Well... No one's perfect. Everyone has flaws. I bet even Ultimate Life Forms have flaws," Sonic says reassuringly, "It's okay though. Flaws make us who we are. The best part about making mistakes is that you get to learn from them."

Shadow rolls his eyes. That was possibly the cheesiest thing he's ever been told. Although, he hates to admit that he feels oddly inspired by it. Not in the traditional sense, but knowing that he has flaws and maybe not so different and alien from everyone else. It's kind of a comforting thought. A little.

Sonic smiles when he sees Shadow's expression and finishes his chilidog in the quiet calm between them. When he's done, he lays on his back and looks up at all the colors that dust across the sky. "Tails brought Omega back to his workshop and is fixing him up. He's gunna find out what's causing his mind to go all haywire," Sonic informs him, "And Rouge is back at the base with Knuckles. She has minor injuries. Just got knocked out really good. Your friends are going to be okay."

Shadow just grunts, indicating he understands.

Sonic frowns at that. It feels like the other is distancing himself. More than usual. He pulls himself back up and tries to lighten the mood, "You must be hungry. You should eat something."

"I... don't know if I like this," Shadow states blandly.

"Won't know until you try," Sonic says with a wink.

Shadow grimaces. He can see Sonic's eyes on him like he's waiting for him to take a bite. He supposes he probably should because Sonic won't stop bugging him until he does. Shadow slowly opens his mouth and takes a small, careful bite. He chews it for what seems like an eternity and lets the taste settle in his mouth. His brows shoot up in shock as he sits in silence.

"Well?" Sonic asks, waiting with baited breath.

Shadow swallows and looks down at the chilidog in awe, "It's... actually good?"

The biggest smile spreads across Sonic's face as he throws his arms around Shadow. He pulls him into a tight hug and cackles, "I knew you'd like it!!!"

Shadow growls when he feels Sonic's arms around him, but he kind of eases into it after awhile. He does notice Sonic doesn't inch away even after his arms let go. He can sense Sonic's arm resting just behind his back too. This is the closest Sonic's been since their last 'encounter' and he's not sure how he feels about it. Especially since Sonic's face is centimeters away from his shoulder.

Shadow tries to continue eating in peace, but Sonic's eyes on him are really distracting. He attempts to not notice them, but it's hard. "What?" Shadow finally asks, as he bites at the word.

Sonic shakes his head, "Nothing." He lifts his thumb up and brushes the side of Shadow's mouth where some remnant crumbs gathered. Even after the action, his thumb stays on the side of Shadow's face.

Shadow looks like he's getting irritated, but when he goes to open his mouth he sees Sonic lean in. Shadow's eyes are wide in disbelief as Sonic presses their lips together. They're soft and warm and Shadow can't help but find his eyelids getting heavy. He stops fighting it and finally closes his eyes, getting lost in the soothing and exciting sensation. He gasps lightly when he feels Sonic's lips twist and move as he positions himself closer.

Their lips meld together and apart and then together again eagerly. Shadow isn't sure if it was Sonic who pushed in for another kiss or himself, but he doesn't much care. Shadow lifts his arm and wraps it loosely around Sonic's neck when he feels the burning warmth against his mouth.

When they pull apart, Shadow's lips are still tingling from the sensation. He has to bite down on his bottom lip because the feeling is so intense. Sonic's eyes are all over his mouth though and the look of longing is actually really attractive.

Sonic sees Shadow notice it and he looks away a bit nervously, "Sorry. I don't know what came over me."

Shadow slides his hand behind Sonic's head and guides him in again. "It was nice," Shadow whisper lowly before connecting their lips again. The moment he does that he feels the arm that's casually resting behind his back, lift up and wrap around his waist. He's pulled in closer, his side flush against Sonic's and his body fits perfectly next to him.

Sonic breathes in and tilts his head to the side. His tongue glides along Shadow's lips, asking for entrance and he moans when Shadow opens his mouth. He seals their mouths together and explores his moist heat as their tongues move as one.

Shadow's brow creases because Sonic's tongue is hot against his and it ignites a dormant fire in his chest. A growl vibrates within his throat and he pushes in a bit rougher. He feels Sonic's hold tighten on his waist as the other's tongue lashes back. Shadow likes the challenge and feels that excitement bubbling up inside him. He leans into Sonic and Sonic leans back as their tongues go to war with one another. Shadow has the leverage though, but in turn causes Sonic to fall back.

Their lips come undone as Sonic's back hits the dock and Shadow catches himself. Shadow is leaning over Sonic, looking down at him in awe. He watches Sonic's hand rest on the arm he's holding himself up with.

The sun is almost set, but Sonic's eyes are shining like radiant emeralds. There's so much hope in them and Shadow is seeing it for the first time. It's a guiding light within the darkness and he's drawn to it.

Sonic is looking up at him with a half-lidded gaze and a content smile on his face when he whispers, "That's just like you to keep me on my toes."

Shadow closes his eyes and shakes his head. Way to ruin the moment, and yet that was just like Sonic as well. Why he finds it charming of all things he'll never understand.

Sonic is looking up at him pleasantly surprised and it takes Shadow a second to realize that he's smiling down at the blue hero. It fades just as quickly as it appears.

Sonic leans up urgently, "Wait! No." He places a hand on Shadow's cheek and rubs at the corner of his mouth, "That was an incredible smile."

Shadow shoves his hand on Sonic's face. Seemingly because he's annoyed, but more so Sonic can't see the smile return to his face. He pulls himself up and looks out into the water. He looks down at his hand and realizes the remainder of his food is gone.

Sonic follows his eyes out to the horizon and erupts into laughter when he sees two seagulls fighting over the floating chilidog in the water.

Looking down at Sonic completely taken over by joy, Shadow can't help but wonder how he got himself into this mess.

This crazy, wonderful mess.

-

Sonic persuades Shadow to follow him to Tails' workshop. Not because he wants to go, but because he wants to see how Omega is doing. His only other option is going back to the hero base to check on Rouge, but that requires seeing the red echidna's dumb face again. So, he trusts Rouge is doing just fine without him.

When they get there, Tails has already gotten to work. Omega's limbs are scattered across the shop. Some completed. Some still completely destroyed. Shadow knows Omega is a robot and his body is artificial, but he still feels kind of ill looking at it. He's never seen his comrade disassembled like this.

"Status report, Tails," Sonic says with a smile as he strides inside.

Shadow falls back, waiting outside like he isn't invited. He stays close enough to listen in on their conversation though.

Tails lifts his face guard up and smiles when he sees Sonic, but it falls when he looks back at the damaged robot. "Well, there's good news and bad news," Tails states.

"Cool. Let's start with the good news," Sonic says cheerfully.

"Well, the good news is that I should be able to assemble Omega's body no problem. Three days tops. I might have to go into the city to get some parts, but it's very much doable," Tails explains.

Sonic nods at each word that comes out of the fox boy's mouth, "Stellar, but... I don't really see what the bad news is."

Tails frowns, "Maybe it's best if we talk to Shadow about it."

"Sweet," Sonic says as a bright smile crosses his face, "I got your man right here." Sonic waves for gloomy hedgehog to come in, "Come on, Shadow."

Shadow looks reluctant, but he agrees anyway. He does want to know what's wrong with his friend. He walks inside and stands uncomfortably next to Sonic.

Tails looks taken aback when he sees Shadow and his whole demeanor changes.

Shadow looks away a bit stubbornly and says, "I'm no longer upset at you. What happened is water under the bridge now. I just need to know what's wrong with Omega." Shadow is also ignoring the impressed look Sonic is giving him.

Tails nods to him, "Okay." He gets up from his work station and wipes his hands clean with a towel. "I'm going to assume you heard about how I'll have Omega's body reassembled in about three days, but... His 'energy source' was damaged. And when I say damaged what I mean is... 'injured.'"

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him like he has no idea what that means.

"Might need to explain it to us, buddy," Sonic offers.

"I think it's better if I show you," Tails replies. He disappears into the back and reappears with a helmet stuffed with shredded newspapers. Inside the homemade nest is a sleeping, bandaged bird. He offers it to Shadow.

Shadow eyes the bird in confusion, but takes it nonetheless. "Omega's... energy source is...?"

Sonic frowns when he sees it. He looks up at Shadow and then back down at the bird. He knows what it means.

Tails goes on to explain, "Sometimes Eggman uses animals to power his robots."

Shadow gives the bird a deeply concerned look. He knows what the problem is. Omega did in fact have a heart and soul. It was just in the form of a living being. If he is to get his friend back he has to imprison this poor, defenseless animal inside.

"I'll see to it the bird makes a full recovery. I'll make my decision then," Shadow tells Tails as he walks out of the workshop.

Tails watches him leave with a sad look and turns to Sonic.

Sonic pats him on the back, "You did a good job, bro. I'll talk to him."

Tails nods back to him.

Shadow holds the makeshift nest close to his chest as he makes his way down the steps. He groans when he hears Sonic's quick footsteps close behind him because he'd rather be alone to mull over this issue. "Please," Shadow says in an irritated tone, "I need a moment to—" He doesn't get another word out when he feels two arms wrap around the front of his torso and Sonic's warm body meet up with his back.

Sonic rests his chin on Shadow's shoulder and whispers, "I'm usually always about freeing captive animals, but I want you to know that whatever you decide to do I'll support it 100%."

Shadow closes his eyelids and feels the pressure behind his eyes. He won't allow himself to cry, but he does feel the heavy wash of sorrow weighing over him. He lifts a hand up and rests it on Sonic's. He turns his head a bit and sees Sonic lift his head off his shoulder to lock eyes with him, "Thank you, Sonic."

Sonic nods and Shadow can see the glistening of sadness in his eyes too. Sonic leans in and kisses him lightly before his arms slip away. "You can stay here. The offer still stands," Sonic says softly.

Shadow looks up at the sky. At the stars piercing through the cover of darkness. He knows he should stay, but there's still that pull toward solitude that's stopping him. He looks down at the sleeping bird and swallows his pride for once in his life for its sake. He turns and faces Sonic and mumbles, "Alright. I'll stay."

Sonic smiles at him like he's proud of him and guides him inside, in the living quarters of the shop. There's a humble living space and a kitchen downstairs, but Sonic shows him upstairs. The attic is full of spare parts and has a slight musk of machine oil. There is a window in the center where the moonlight is shining in.

Before Shadow can question it Sonic is rushing down the stairs again, "I'll grab some blankets!"

Shadow rolls his eyes and sets the nest on the window sill. He doesn't want to bother the healing bird more than he already has.

Sonic is rushing up the stairs a moment later, tripping over the mess of blankets and pillows. He looks around spastically like he's looking for something.

Shadow sighs and walks over to the piles of scrap. He glances it over before spotting what looks like a discarded pilot seat. He pulls it out and drags it over to the window, clicking it backwards so it's

horizontal.

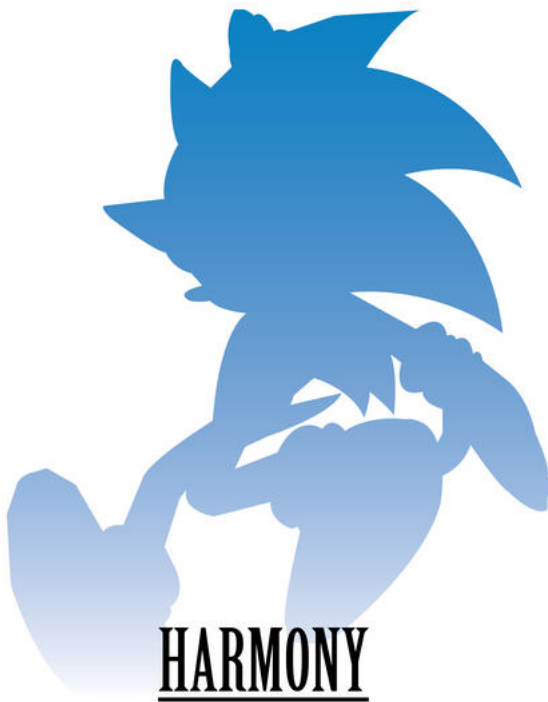
Sonic smiles when he sees it and rushes over to tuck some sheets over it and plop a pillow down against the lowered headrest. "Looking good," Sonic comments with a big grin. He turns to the piles of junk around him and rests his hands on his hips, "Man, Tails is a packrat. I didn't realize how much junk he was storing up here."

"It's fine," Shadow states disregarding the mess. He lays down on his newly made bed and gazes out the window, completely spacing out. It's a few long moments until he realizes Sonic is still there looking down at him. Shadow waves him off, "You may go now."

"Sorry, Sorry. I just..." Sonic says nervously as a light blush dusts across his cheeks. He turns to walk to the stairs, "I'll uh... let you know when breakfast is ready in the morning." His eyes don't leave Shadow as he takes the first couple steps down the stairs. He almost trips and falls, but catches himself. "I'm okay!" He shouts from the bottom step.

Shadow shakes his head and rolls his eyes. What an idiotic hedgehog. What a complete moron. Shadow hates that he can't control the smile that creeps across his face when he thinks about him. Why was that blue imbecile able to make him smile even at his lowest?

Understanding



Chapter Four: Understanding

Shadow wakes to chirping the next morning and he mistakes it for the morning songs of birds outside, but when he opens his eyes he sees that the bird next to him is awake. He sits up and looks the small animal over before presenting his finger to it. He waits and lets the bird nuzzle its face into it. Shadow smiles sadly and wonders if it knows who he is or if it's simply only the energy source. Was it possible Omega's memories are in there somewhere?

He gets no further time to contemplate it because there's a crash heard from downstairs. Shadow jolts awake and takes hold of his Chaos Emerald. He teleports to the lower level of the house and looks around, "What's wrong!?"

Sonic has a *Kiss the Cook* apron on as bacon is burning on the stove and a mixing bowl (with what appears to be pancake batter) on the floor. He gives Shadow a sheepish look when he says, "S-sorry. Did I wake you?"

Shadow glares at the blue hero and rubs the sleep out of his eyes. He walks over to the kitchen area and pushes past Sonic. He turns the stove off and picks the bowl up, tossing it into the sink. He snags one of the towels hanging from the counter and starts cleaning up the mess. "You have no experience in the kitchen," Shadow states as he scrubs at the ground.

"That's not true," Sonic tries to defend himself, "I've... watched... Amy cook. ...Once."

Shadow's lip curls into a snarl not wanting to think how that transpired. Disgusted with the rag, he tosses that too in the sink. He grabs the sponge that's laying on the side and pours soap on it before

scrubbing the ever living crap out of the mixing bowl.

Shadow asks as he does the minor task, “What exactly are you and Amy?”

Sonic gives him a confused look before answering carefully, “...Hedgehogs?”

Shadow turns to Sonic sharply and his eyes darken.

Sighing, Sonic leans against the counter. He pouts and taps his foot on the ground. He looks like he definitely doesn't want to talk about it. “If you want my honest answer, I don't know? I saved her once and she just... followed me. I was young. I was in that ‘gross, icky girls’ phase of my life. And I was hoping I'd grow out of it and then... I didn't. So, now I feel bad for leading her on for years,” Sonic explains, brows lowered and fist clenched.

Shadow side glances Sonic and sees his tense posture. So, things *did* get to him. This seemed like a major one. Shadow dries off the bowl and starts going to work on making the batter. Once he adds some eggs and water, he starts mixing it while taking in Sonic's defeated stance. “I don't believe that's leading her on,” Shadow finally says quietly.

Sonic slides down from the counter and lets his butt collide with the ground. He buries his face into his palms and groans, “Try telling that to her. Try telling that to literally anyone. I've been trying to avoid this for ten years. I was hoping she'd just give up.” Sonic kicks his foot out and sinks down lower so he's almost laying on the tiled floor, “When she follows me around everyone laughs and ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs’ at it and...”

Shadow nods as if he understands before adding, “...And everyone encourages it. So, she sees no need to give up on the fantasy because she believes that one day it'll come to fruition.”

Sonic hears Shadow click the stove on and spray the pan. He watches him pour the batter into it and let it cook. The aroma of it already smells amazing. It almost makes him forget about their conversation entirely.

“You should pull the Band-Aid off sooner rather later,” Shadow states maturely, “It's best not to hide and suffocate the wound.”

Sonic makes a grossed-out face. He gets the metaphor, but he kind of wanted to keep his appetite. Of course he knows Shadow's right though. He's just afraid that the moment he does it, he'll stop being the good guy in his friend's eyes.

He hesitantly looks up at Shadow and asks, “So... What are *we*?”

Shadow doesn't say anything. He flips the pancake and places a finger to his chin thoughtfully. He finally looks down at Sonic with a half-lidded gaze, “...Hedgehogs.”

Sonic doesn't get it at first. It takes Shadow cracking a smile to realize it was a joke. Sonic slides all the way down on the ground and laughs hysterical at it. “I didn't know you were capable of making jokes, Shadow,” Sonic snorts out between his laughter.

“There's a first for everything, I suppose,” Shadow comments evenly, even though he can feel his heart hitch with each laugh that bubbles up from Sonic's mouth.

He's beginning to really, really enjoy his laughter.

As Sonic places his empty plate in the sink, he's stretching and smiling widely. "That breakfast was amazing! It's been so long since I've had a meal that good! I feel great! I feel like I can take on the world," Sonic announces with excitement as he pole vaults over the counter.

Shadow tries not to let the compliment get to him as he rinses the plates off. He does give Sonic a look though when he sees the other running around the small home, just barely missing fragile obstacles. "It's probably best you go outside if you're going to run around like that," Shadow warns.

When he hears that, Sonic stops mid-stride. It's a good thing too because he was about to knock over a lamp. He spins around a few time energetically and stops to watch Shadow, "Then, you should come with me. I could use some friendly competition."

Shadow glances over at the blue hero from over his shoulder and gives him a smirk, "Are you sure that's a wise invitation?"

"Are you insinuating I can't take you?" Sonic asks with his hands on his hips, "You've got the power, but I have the speed. You can't hit what you can't catch."

"You're joking, right?" Shadow says with amusement as he walks over to the other, "With the Chaos Emerald, I'm faster than you are."

"Fine, no emeralds. Just you and me. Mono e mono," Sonic declares with a cocky grin, "But I understand if you're *scared*."

"That's cute," Shadow states with a condescending tone as he places his emerald on the table, "*You* should be afraid of *me*. I am the Ultimate Life Form."

"Okay, Mr. Ultimate Life Form," Sonic snickers. He backs up against the door and kicks it open, pulling Shadow in and tossing him over his shoulder out the door.

Shadow catches himself and his shoes ignite, charring the grass as he skids across the ground. He looks up at Sonic and shakes his head, "The only way you have an edge on me is if you use cheap tricks."

"It's called a surprise attack," Sonic hops down and does a homing attack. He doesn't expect to be blocked and slammed into the ground though. He spits out a few blades of grass before pulling himself back up. He spin dashes at Shadow a moment later and sees him flip over with the use of his hover shoes. "And using super powered shoes isn't a cheap trick?" Sonic asks.

Shadow lands gently on the hillside and folds his arms across his chest, "The shoes are run by the chaos energy inside me. My shoes alone aren't what aid me. It's a simple transfer of energy. Nothing more."

Sonic rushes at Shadow and sends a few punches his way. All are easily blocked, but it's okay. He kind of likes the leisureliness of it. "Wow. Are you serious?" Sonic says like he's impressed, "I didn't know anyone could have chaos energy inside them without the Chaos Emeralds."

Shadow smirks and dodges one of Sonic's punches. He quickly wraps his hands around his arm and tosses him over his shoulder. Revenge for catching him off guard. He slowly walks over to the downed hedgehog and gazes down at him, "I'm not the only one who harbors dormant chaos energy inside them. I've noticed the blue aura around you when you attack as well. I was intrigued when I first saw it."

"If I didn't know any better, I'd say that was a compliment," Sonic says as he swings his legs around in an attempt to trip Shadow.

Shadow's ankles do get caught, but he's more caught off guard by the comment. He falls to the ground and watches as Sonic climbs on top of him, pinning him down. "It was simply an observation," Shadow scoffs.

Sonic snickers and leans down, kissing Shadow on the cheek. He gets up a moment later and trudges down the hill, "You're it!"

Shadow feels his entire face heat up from the kiss and he's on his feet in an instant. He gets a running start before his shoes flare to life. "Tag? Really?" Shadow sneers, "Aren't you a bit old to be playing games like this?"

"I'm young at heart!" Sonic shouts back to him.

Shadow is glad the other's back is facing him because a smile melts across his face. Shadow spins and boosts, but jumps and flips his body over the running hedgehog. His shoes skid across the grass and his hand shoots out to grab Sonic's wrist. He pulls the blue hero in, feeling the other's feet dragging across the ground as he skates on a curved path before stopping. He trails a few light kisses up Sonic's chest before placing a proper one onto his neck. Shadow lets go and watches the other stumble back.

Sonic blinks like he's trying to figure out what just happened. He rests a hand on the warm spot still tingling on his neck as he look up at Shadow in awe.

"You're it," Shadow smirks, watching him with half-lidded eyes before darting away.

"W-wait!" Sonic shouts as he rushes after him. He's more determined than ever to catch him now. He follows Shadow back up the hill and boosts forward with everything he has as he wraps his arms around Shadow's waist. They tumble to the ground and Sonic tries to pin Shadow down again.

Shadow isn't having it though and he rolls over, but he's surprised when Sonic rolls him back over. They roll around the ground a few times before plummeting down the small hill. They tumble down and Shadow feels his back land softly into the grass below him. He looks up and sees Sonic on top of him once more.

Sonic is looking down at him with a look of adoration before leaning down and pressing his lips against Shadow's tenderly.

Shadow feels the familiar warmth spread across his chest, but he uses this distraction to his advantage. He shimmies his legs free and plants them on Sonic's chest, kicking him over his body. Shadow stands up again, placing the back of his hand to his mouth.

When Sonic gets his bearings, he stands and smirks at Shadow's reaction. "I think you liked that one," Sonic taunts, tapping his finger against his lips.

Shadow growls and hates how his face heats up. That wasn't a kiss. He'd show him what an actual kiss was. Shadow boosts forward, but Sonic dodges. He flips and skates, arms reaching out for the other, but Sonic is always a hair away from him. Shadow snarls angrily because Sonic is giving him a mocking look every time he tries and fails.

He chases Sonic down toward the area where there's a divot in the ground and a pond resting below. Getting tired of Sonic's games, his body erupts with yellow chaos energy and he releases a dozen spears of light at him.

Sonic gasps and dodges them as quickly as he can. He almost evades them all, but the last one hits its target. It wouldn't be such a big deal, but Sonic feels his muscles seize and his body falls down the

small cliff. A large splash is heard shortly after.

The gravity of what just happened settles in over Shadow and he pales. He rushes over to the cliff and lands at the bottom. When he looks around, he can't spot Sonic anywhere. Can Sonic swim? Shadow has no idea. He's never seen him do it before. Shadow's shoes flare up again and he hovers over the pond, eyes frantically searching the watery depths below him. "Sonic?" Shadow asks and quietly waits for a response. When he doesn't get one, he tries again but with more terror in his voice, "Sonic!?"

The pond is murky and hard to see. It doesn't help that there are so many lily pads growing along the surface. Besides a few fish swimming, he sees no movement. No air bubbles. Nothing.

Shadow's heart hammers in his chest. Did he just kill him? Did he kill Sonic the Hedgehog? Shadow hovers a bit higher to get a better view of his surroundings, but gasps when he feels two arms grab him from behind. He's pulled through the waterfall and his shoes sputter out from the instant contact with water. His body falls back against rocky ground and he realizes he's inside of a cave of some kind.

"I was going to shoot out and surprise you, but you looked so sad," Sonic says with a small laugh, "I didn't mean to scare you."

Shadow wipes his face, feeling the water droplets forming there. He clenches his teeth and pushes away from Sonic. He makes his way to a secluded part of the cave and sits down on a rock as he pulls off his shoes. He tilts them back and watches the water pour out from the thrusters on the soles. Great. He'd have to wait for them to dry before he can use them again.

Sonic slowly walks over to him and frowns, "I said I was sorry."

"For what?" Shadow says dismissively, "It's not like I was scared."

Sonic gives him a doubtful look, but doesn't call him out on it. He sits down next to him and looks over at his shoes with a frown. "Did I ruin them?" Sonic asks.

Shadow shakes his head, "No, but they only work when they're dry."

"Sounds like you hate the water just as much as I do," Sonic says with a laugh.

Shadow just looks away a bit shamed and folds his arms across his chest. He sounds closed off and insecure when he admits, "I was created in space. I wasn't built to trudge through water. If you were actually drowning, I don't think..."

"It's okay. I can't swim either. I sink like a rock. Luckily, I was able to land on one of the lily pads," Sonic explains with a smile, "It only made a loud splash when I landed."

Shadow's hand carefully rests on Sonic's and his fingers curl around his, "I'm glad you're alright."

Sonic finds himself blushing and his smile widens, "Don't worry. It'll take more than a little water to do me in. Heck, I fought a building tall water god by myself." He omits the fact that he had the power of the seven Chaos Emeralds, but he was just trying to reassure Shadow.

Shadow ignores Sonic's comment and pulls his hand toward him causing the blue hero to lean in closer. He places a soft kiss on Sonic's lips and he feels Sonic lean into it in turn. It's a slow movement of lips and Shadow shivers slightly when a gentle hand cup the back of his head.

When Sonic pulls away slightly, he smiles at him and whispers, "I guess I'm it."

Shadow is going to scold him for ruining the moment again, but remains silent when Sonic's arm pulls him in closer. Their bodies flush against each other sends electricity through him. Shadow rests a trembling hand on Sonic's chest and feels the soft, bare skin there. He feels the vibration of Sonic's moan against his lips and it tingles at every nerve in his body.

He looks up at Sonic with both anger and confusion when he feels him pull away. He doesn't say anything, just watches Sonic back up into the wall and smirk at him.

"Your turn," Sonic says playfully.

"I've had enough of this game," Shadow replies, clearly exasperated.

"It's not a game anymore," Sonic clarifies as he spreads his legs apart a bit and leans into a more suggestive pose, "It's an open invitation."

"Oh," Shadow says a bit dumbly before it dawns on him what Sonic means, "*Oh!*" His face flares up before he buries his face in his palms. He just didn't expect Sonic to be so forward about this. Then again, it was Sonic after all.

Sonic laughs a bit when he sees Shadow's reaction and pushes off the wall a little, "It's alright if you're still uncomfortable about it. I'm not forcing you."

"That's not it," Shadow shakes his head before getting to his feet. He makes his way over to Sonic and watches him leaning back against the wall, blue quills pluming around his head like waves. Shadow takes a moment to admire him before pressing himself against Sonic and kissing him.

When their lips separate Sonic whispers, "What is it then?"

Shadow's hips snap forward and they both moan in unison before he answers, "The events of that day. Your body so close to mine... It's been on my mind nonstop. It won't leave me and I'm afraid that means I'm becoming attached to you."

Sonic laughs breathlessly as he replies, "That isn't something to be afraid of. I can assure you that I'm just as attached to you."

"Exactly," Shadow murmurs as he nuzzles his face into the crook of Sonic's neck, "We're too different. Our goals... Our objectives always clash with one another." Shadow's hips jerk up once more and he hums in the back of his throat when he gets Sonic's moan loud in his ear. "This will never work," Shadow whispers a bit shakily.

Sonic's arms wrap around Shadow's back and he holds onto him tightly. Once he catches his breath he responds, "You're such a pessimist, Shads. Of course this will work." He hears Shadow grunt and he has to pry the gloomy hedgehog out of his hiding place. He grips Shadow's shoulders and looks him in the eye, "It'll work."

There was that hope again. Gleaming in his eyes. Shadow can't look away from it. It almost makes him believe.

Shadow's hand slides down Sonic's thigh and pulls his leg up against his side. He can feel Sonic's breaths getting heavier and his heart beating faster. He looks up at Sonic once more as if to ask permission. When he sees Sonic nodding with anticipation, Shadow feels his body ignite. He slips inside Sonic's searing body and hears the content sigh in his ear.

"There you are," Sonic whispers like he's been waiting for this and he holds onto Shadow's shoulders tighter.

Shadow growls and buries his face into his neck again. Damn, for some reason that was exactly what he needed to hear to start moving. When he pushes inside again, he gets a sharp breath in his ear from Sonic and that alone makes him feel like he was losing his mind.

Sonic shudders against him when Shadow digs his fingers into his leg, lifting it up a bit higher. He moans blissfully as he feels himself open up more and Shadow reaching deeper inside him. There's a serene look on Sonic's face and a slight smile that falters only a bit with each thrust of Shadow's hips.

A low rumble of a moan vibrates from Shadow's throat. He's completely encased in that heat. All around him. Quivering walls welcoming him in. It's incredible. "You feel so good," Shadow whispers lightly.

Sonic bows his head a bit with that and croons out like all the air is being pushed out of his lungs, "So do you."

It's a slow motion. One neither of them thought they'd ever enjoy, but they savor it wholly.

Sonic grips one of Shadow's hips and holds him as close as he can. Shadow's moving in just the right ways and he can feel the pressure building. His fingers tremble a bit and he cries out, "Shadow!"

Shadow kisses up to Sonic's neck and holds. He feels himself coming undone and he knows Sonic is close. He rides it out until Sonic's release and he pulls away just enough to watch Sonic turn into a panting, quivering mess. Shadow's eyes blow when he sees it. It's the most astounding thing he's ever seen and he loves it.

When they come down, Shadow leans in and kisses Sonic's trembling lips. That was undoubtedly better than the last. More intimate. More real. Shadow holds Sonic tightly against him and just wants to bask in the heat of the other. He feels the most complete he's ever had.

"Holy crap," Sonic pants out as he presses his forehead against Shadow's shoulder, "Holy *crap*." He's stunned, but laughing a bit as well. He doesn't have any other words, but he thinks he doesn't need any because Shadow is nodding along to his statement.

They sit together for a long while just holding each other. They both know Shadow's shoes are more than dry, but there's something peaceful about the solitude of it all. There's something magical about the moment. Something surreal, but at the same time very real. They feel like one complete entity.

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After awhile in the cave, Sonic suggests they get back soon. They did kind of leave without warning or anything. It's not that Sonic doesn't trust Tails alone. The opposite actually. Sonic does more collateral damage to the place, but he doesn't want Tails to worry.

Shadow hops down the cliff side first and his hover shoes sputter to life before he hits the ground, breaking his fall. He waits for Sonic to jump and helps him land properly. He kind of warns Sonic about sticking his landings so he doesn't blow out his ankles, but he just brushes Shadow off telling him he's all about looking cool.

Shadow doesn't bother and just walks with him down the path. When they get back to the hill Tails' workshop is on, Sonic not-so-subtly takes Shadow's hand. Shadow looks down at it and feels the warmth of their palms together.

"Is this alright?" Sonic asks a bit nervously.

Shadow doesn't see why it wouldn't be.

"I uh... kinda wanna tell my bro we're a thing," Sonic explains as he rubs the back of his neck, "We *are* a thing, right?"

Shadow finds himself laughing under his breath at the other's choice in words. "Yes, we are a *thing*," Shadow confirms, putting ample amount of emphasis on the last word.

Sonic is just watching Shadow in awe with a blush creeping up his face.

"What?" Shadow asks in confusion.

"Uh... Nothing," Sonic sputters out and it's suddenly hard for him to look at Shadow, "Just... your laugh. It's hot."

"Oh," Shadow tries to say dismissively even though he feels his chest heat up from the comment.

"SONIC!!!"

They both jump when they hear the ear piercing noise. Sonic looks petrified when he sees who's running toward them. He backs up a little and plasters a fake smile on his face.

Shadow follows his eyes and sees the pink hedgehog running toward them. He doesn't really seem fazed by it though. He just waits for her to approach.

She doesn't take any notice to Shadow, but goes straight for Sonic, "How could you! You called everyone except me when Eggman attacked! I could have helped! You're so mean, Sonic!"

"Amy. I just... I didn't," Sonic's hand slowly slips away from Shadow's as he backs up a little more.

"What? You think I'm just a liability! Don't you? I'm not!" She goes on saying.

Sonic steps behind Shadow and uses him as a barrier, "I never said you were. It's just... It wasn't a big deal. We had it covered."

"Knuckles said you almost *died*! I don't know what I'd do if anything were to happen to my darling Sonic while I wasn't there," Amy shouts with tears in her eyes.

Shadow is standing between the two, unmoving. Each step Amy takes to get around him is another step Sonic takes and angling him at her. Shadow sighs finding all of this incredibly tedious.

"It's not like you'd be able to do much even if something did happen," Sonic tries to say, but he realizes too late that it came out wrong. He swallows thickly when he sees the fire ignite in the pink hedgehog's eyes.

She stomps her foot down and reaches her arms around Shadow to get at Sonic, "How *dare* you! I've grown so much over the years! I'm strong enough to come on missions with you now!"

Shadow whips his hand up and pushes Amy's arms away. It causes her to stumble a little and he uses her momentary dizziness to swing around and kick her in the back of the head. He watches her go down and glares at her fallen body.

"Shadow! You can't do that!" Sonic cries out, horrified by what just happened.

"She was trying to attack you," Shadow indicates like he's confused by Sonic's reaction.

“She’s a defenseless *girl*, Shadow! You’re the strongest thing *alive!*” Sonic points out to him spastically, “You can’t just attack people who are significantly weaker than you!”

Shadow crosses his arms across his chest and just murmurs, “I didn’t attack her. It was a retaliation.”

Sonic grips his head and lets out an irritated noise. He doesn’t bother with Shadow at the moment though. He turns to Amy and tries to help her up, “I’m so sorry, Ames. Shadow’s uh... antisocial?”

Amy pulls her head out of the grass and glares at Sonic like it’s his fault. She angrily grabs her hammer and pulls herself back up. She grits out with tears streaming down her face, “So you *do* think I’m weak! I knew it! You lied to me!” She starts swinging her hammer in his direction frantically.

“Amy!” Sonic tries to say while dodging the attacks. “Amy, please,” he continues trying to calm her down, “Let’s talk about this!”

“There’s nothing to talk about! You’ll never love me because I’ll never be strong enough!” She keeps going, whipping her weapon faster.

“No, that’s not it,” Sonic tries to explain through the frenzy. He hops and dodges the hammer, wincing when it comes close. He backs up with each swing and stumbles right into Shadow.

The hammer comes down once more and Shadow looks absolutely done. He snaps his hand up and grabs the brightly colored weapon and pulls it out of her hands. Only needing one hand, he strikes the girl with only a fraction of his strength. She still goes down though.

Sonic spins around and gets in Shadow’s face, “What the heck!?”

Shadow doesn’t like Sonic’s tone, “This is pointless.”

“You can’t hit Amy. She’s a *girl*,” Sonic explains louder like it’ll get through to him that way.

“I work with plenty of military agents who are both men and women. My own partner is a woman. I’m not going to sit here and pretend any of this has to do with gender. I don’t care if it’s a boy or girl that’s trying to hit you. If I deem them a threat, I’m going to step in,” Shadow states sternly, “Do I make myself clear?”

“Look, I get where you’re coming from,” Sonic responds with anger, “but Amy is a weak, defenseless girl.”

Shadow holds up the hammer to him, “She has a weapon.”

Sonic grabs the hammer and tosses it to the side, “She won it as a prize at an amusement park! It’s practically a *toy!*”

Amy lifts herself off the ground and sniffs loudly, “I-is that all I am to you? A joke?”

Sonic’s face drops and he looks away with agitation. He lifts his gaze back up to Shadow and just stares at him, “This is what I’m talking about. No matter what I do, when it comes to Amy, I always lose.” Sonic walks past Shadow and inside the workshop, slamming the door as he gets in.

Shadow looks down like he has no idea what just happened. He couldn’t have predicted any of Sonic’s reactions. It was bizarre. His head perks up a bit when he hears the girl start talking to him.

“I’m worthless, aren’t I?” She asks with a pitiful look.

Shadow doesn't understand the question. "How so?"

"I'm not strong enough," she responds weakly.

Shadow raises an eyebrow, "Strength isn't a equivalent to worth."

She raises her head a little, "What do you mean?"

"Strength is having the skill to do something. Worth is your value," Shadow attempts to explain in the simplest way he can at the top of his head.

"...but if I was good at fighting, I'd be a more valued member of the team and then I'd be able to work alongside Sonic," Amy replies with a frown.

Shadow finds her logic confusing, "Does everything you do revolve around Sonic?"

She nods without hesitation.

Shadow doesn't know how to respond to that. He just looks away with sadness. He remembers the hate, anger, and vengeance. All in the name of Maria. He had thought that's what she wanted from him, but it took Amy's perspective to realize that she didn't want that at all. His mind was so clouded by grief that it was feeding him lies and illusions.

He glances back over at Amy and then at her abandoned hammer. He walks over to it and picks it up before making his way back over to her. "Have you thought that maybe... this isn't what Sonic intended for you?" He asks carefully.

"What do you mean?" She says a bit distraught.

"Think about it... Why would Sonic want you to become a warrior?" Shadow questions.

She opens her mouth, but then closes it. She takes a moment to think about it before looking back up at him, "Then... what do you think he wants from me?"

Shadow rolls his eyes because he knows the answer. He hates how he can hear Sonic saying it in his head too. "He wants you to live free and on your own terms," Shadow responds as he tries to keep a scowl on his face.

"That's it?" Amy asks.

Shadow nods.

"And then I'll win his heart?"

Shadow's face drops, "I think you're missing the point."

Amy shrinks and twirls her hammer in her hand, "I know..." She finally gets up with a bit more confidence and dusts off her dress, "Well, then I'll become stronger. I'll train really hard, but I'll do it on my terms."

Shadow lets out a dark laugh and adds, "And then you can trade that cheap piece of plastic for a *real* weapon."

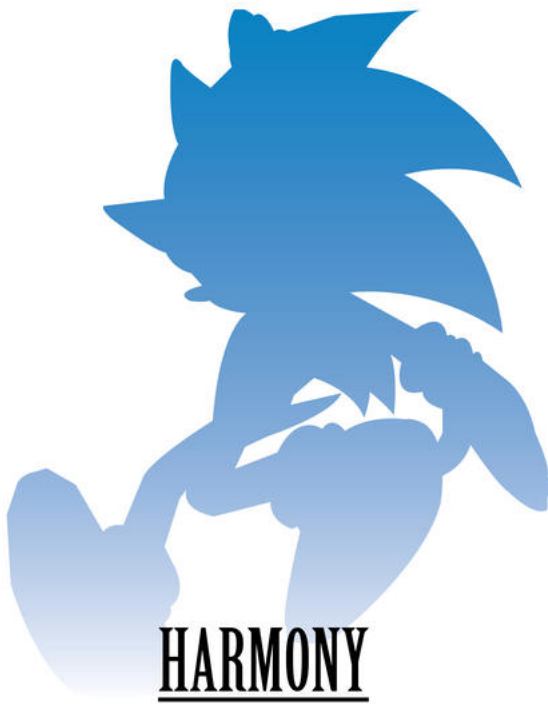
Amy pushes him and Shadow surprisingly stumbles back a bit, "You're such a sadist." She goes to walk off, but stops. She looks over her shoulder and asks, "And what did you mean when you said that you'd step in if you deemed anyone a threat to Sonic?"

Shadow's brows shoot up and he looks away a bit embarrassed. He wasn't aware that she was actually listening to him when he said that. "I don't know what you're talking about," he replies with a scowl.

"Right," she says like she doesn't believe him, "Well, you better be ready. In another three years you might have another rival on your hands."

He watches her go, but shakes his head. There was no way. He stops and looks down at the indentation of the ground where he dropkicked her. He stares at it for a long while and wonders. The girl could actually take a hit. So, perhaps that wasn't such a big impossibility.

Warming Up



Chapter Five: Warming Up

Shadow is surprised that they have more than one guest in Tails' workshop. Knuckles is sitting at the counter, staring bullets at him as Tails explains that Rouge is here as well. When the fox informs him that she's in the attic tending to the bird, he feels his heart leap into his throat. He doesn't let it show though. He just makes his way up the stairs.

When he gets to the top step, he sees Rouge sitting in his 'homemade' bed and petting the bird's head delicately with her finger. She has a bandage around her head and some partially healed scratches here and there.

Shadow goes to open his mouth, but Rouge beats him to it, "I always wondered what kind of bird Omega was."

"What?" Shadow questions.

She sighs and turns her attention over to Shadow, patting the empty space next to her.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Shadow asks as he sits down. He's more in shock than angry at this point.

Rouge gazes out the window thoughtfully and replies, "I wonder."

"You hacked into the doctor's database," Shadow states.

She nods, "When we first met Omega."

Shadow closes his eyes and hangs his head, "What should we do?"

"I don't know if I can answer that. I'm the greedy one, Shadow," Rouge explains lightly, "I'll probably tell you the wrong thing."

"So, you're leaving the decision to me," Shadow says in defeat.

"Because I know you'll do the right thing," Rouge responds as she places her hand on Shadow's chest.

Shadow looks down at her hand and sees that she's referring to the white patch on his chest. His heart. The one thing Black Doom's DNA wasn't able to corrupt. He grimaces at it, sometimes wishing it wasn't there. "I was hoping you'd talk me out of doing the right thing," Shadow states bitterly.

Rouge just laughs and winces a bit when she goes to cross her legs.

Shadow winces with her like he can feel her pain. She brushes off his concern though. He looks away and stares down at his feet, "You didn't tell me because I would have gotten in the way of our objective."

She shrugs, "Maybe. Who knows. Maybe I got attached to him too. Maybe I saw that you made a friend. Someone who you could finally relate to."

"That's so messed up," Shadow says through clenched teeth.

"I also worry about your future. The future where I'm not with you," she goes on to say, "You can become really self-destructive when you're alone."

Shadow rubs at his wrists and laughs under his breath, "Pun intended?"

She snickers with him, but it dies down rather quickly. That joke was dark for even them.

"I think I'll be okay," Shadow looks up with determination, "Whatever the future holds... I think I'll be ready for it."

Rouge glances over at Shadow and raises an eyebrow, "Wow. You spent one day here and your spirits are already lifted."

Shadow buries his face in his hands and groans.

She pats him on the back, "No, it's a good thing. You need a little hope in your life."

"It's that damn blue hedgehog," Shadow admits clutching his fingers into his skull, "I think I really am lovesick."

Rouge laughs into her hand rather loudly. She sees how miserable Shadow looks and she leans into him a little more. She looks at him expectantly, "...So?"

"What?" He says with irritation.

Rouge's mouth twists into a tight smile.

Shadow gives her an uneasy look. He grumbles under his breath before nodding.

Her eyes light up like diamonds. "Are you serious?"

“...Yes.”

Her wings flutter in excitement as she shakes Shadow by the shoulders, “I can’t believe it! You and blue!? Who would have thought!”

“Not me clearly,” he pouts when he feels Rouge smother him in a tight hug. This was so embarrassing.

Rouge pushes him back and looks at him like she’s just had an epiphany, “That reminds me. Knuckles came to apologize.”

Shadow eyes her like she grew a second head, “How the *hell--?*”

She pulls Shadow with her and carts him down the stairs. The moment Shadow gets in the same room as Knuckles, neither of them are looking at one another. Rouge gets in between the two and give them both a wide smile, “Isn’t there something you want to say, Knuckles?”

Knuckles grumbles stubbornly, “Why do you have to make this more awkward than it already is?”

Sadly, this is the one thing he can agree with Knuckles on. He hates how much time Rouge spends around this foul echidna.

Knuckles breathes and manages to say, “Sorry.”

Shadow doesn’t say anything. Just stands with his back to him and folds his arms across his chest.

“No, really,” Knuckles goes on, “I’m sorry for what I did. I didn’t properly assess the situation... I guess.”

“You guess,” Shadow spits back mockingly.

“Okay. Yeah, I misjudged it. A lot,” Knuckles pouts, “Rouge told me what happened and... I’m sorry. About Omega. That sucks.”

“It does suck,” Shadow affirms.

“I went off the rails when I saw that Rouge was down. And...” Knuckles finds himself blushing a little before continuing, “...I care about her too.”

Rouge’s eyes widen as she places a hand to her mouth, “Is that true?”

“Yeah,” Knuckles averts his eyes, “but I know I’m nothing compared to the ultimate jerk over there.”

Rouge’s eyelashes flutter a bit as she turns beat red.

“You’re joking, right?” Shadow says with a scowl, “You’re one of Sonic’s friends. You’re telling me he didn’t tell you that we aren’t ‘partners’ in that way?”

“Sonic and I aren’t that close!” Knuckles shouts suddenly, “We’re on a team, but we’re more rivals than anything. I spend most of my time on Angel Island.”

Shadow stares at him blandly. This guy was more of a recluse than he was. “Well, let me clarify. Rouge and I are partners in *arms*. We’re assigned missions together. That’s it. Whatever she does off the clock is none of my concern,” Shadow explains as professionally as he can.

“So, I just...” Knuckles groans and holds his face with his hands in complete embarrassment, “I just confessed for nothing?”

“Not for nothing, handsome,” Rouge replies with a suggestive smirk as she practically floats into his arms.

“Tch,” Shadow rolls his eyes turns away again. He does feel a bit better after it. He feels less like breaking his skull and more like tossing him off a cliff.

“Don’t worry, honey. Shadow is already taken,” Rouge tells Knuckles with a smirk as she traces her finger across his chin.

Shadow stiffens, reverting back to wanting to break skulls.

“Really?” He asks Rouge before turning to Shadow, “Who?”

“Someone who can actually *keep up* with his libido. I’m sure,” Rouge teases.

Shadow growls and stomps back upstairs completely done with this conversation. He winces when he hears the echidna shout Sonic’s name loudly though. He collapses onto his temporary bed and buries his face in the pillow.

Why? Why him? Someone, please, end him.

-

Shadow stays upstairs most of the day. He can hear Sonic’s friends clamoring downstairs. It even sounds like more people have joined them. He wondered if this was a reoccurring occasion, something that happened once in awhile, or if it was some kind of party. He didn’t care too much though. He liked the solitude.

He could pick up Sonic’s cheerful voice downstairs. It also sounds like he’s teasing Knuckles. A lot. Shadow tries not to smirk at that. His grin drops as soon as it’s there though. He remembers just how angry Sonic was with him. He wouldn’t usually care about something as trivial as this, but he does. He can’t get those striking emerald eyes and his twisted scowl out of his head.

What do people usually do in this situation? Apologize? He could, but he doesn’t know what for. Possibly for ‘attacking’ the pink one. Although, as much as she seemed to whine and cry she didn’t physically seem too effected by it.

He tries not to think too hard over it. He just tends to the bird here and there and keeps checking to see if he’s gotten any messages from GUN. He could really use a mission right now in order to leave with an excuse. He doesn’t know why he’d need an excuse to leave, but somehow he’d feel rude about doing it. Which was weird because he isn’t participating in anything that’s happening downstairs.

Shadow hears their talking all throughout the night and finally decides to give up and fall asleep. His fingers itch around his communicator, wishing to get any orders at all, but he doesn’t. He closes his eyes with it still in his hand and drifts off to sleep.

In the middle of the night, he stirs a little when he feels an unfamiliar weight on him. When he opens one eye, all he sees is blue. He refocuses his eyes and takes notice to how Sonic is laying on top of him with his face buried in the white patch on his chest. Shadow isn’t quite sure what this means, but he doesn’t exactly despise it. He lifts a hand and runs his fingers across the smooth skin on Sonic’s shoulder. It’s actually really soft.

He doesn't mean to wake the other up with the action, but Sonic pulls his face up from Shadow's now disheveled chest fur and slowly lifts his head up. He meets Shadow's confused gaze and finally realizes what's happening. He sits up, looking a bit awkward when he feels Shadow's hand guide him back down. Sonic looks up at Shadow's face as his chin rests on his chest now. He looks like he wants to say something, but he doesn't.

"I'm sorry," Shadow finally says. Sonic looking at him uncomfortably like this is almost as bad as the bout of anger. Except Shadow can take the anger. He's used to it. It's this confliction and awkwardness that troubles him.

Sonic looks surprised by his apology though. He bites his lip and shakes his head, "No, I'm sorry, Shadow. I don't know why I got so angry."

There's a calculative look on Shadow's face when he replays the events. He tries to figure it out himself. Sonic's avoidant behavior. Wanting to run away. He thinks he gets it now. Shadow tries to verbalize his thoughts, "You were put into a situation you couldn't escape from. It was just your fight or flight response kicking in. I should have noticed it sooner. I must have been triggering it and making the situation worse."

Sonic raises an eyebrow at him before laughing quietly, "Geez. Ya don't have to get all technical on me." He's quiet for a moment before fidgeting a little, "Also... Out of all the people I didn't expect *you* to be giving Amy a pep talk. Whatever you said to her... she seems a lot better now."

"Circumstances called for it," Shadow explains like it's nothing, "It wouldn't have helped coming from the object of her affection. The you she had in her mind was just an illusion. So, whatever you had to say it would have been ignored entirely. Which is why things probably escalated like they had. But hearing it from an outside source put things into perspective for her." Shadow looks up and sees that Sonic is looking at him in awe. A smirk graces his face when he finishes, "Although, I'm sure you would have done it much more eloquently if circumstances were different."

"Pep talking *is* my MO," Sonic replies with a wink.

Shadow acts on the urge to pull Sonic in closer and they cuddle together. It's a weird feeling, but he likes how close the other gets to the side of his face. They settle in a little and Shadow rests his hands loosely on Sonic's lower back.

"Although, I am a little mad that you told Knuckles about us before I could tell Tails," Sonic grumbles a bit childishly.

"I didn't say a word. Rouge opened her mouth," Shadow explains.

"You told Ro—Oh, right," Sonic says like he'd almost forgotten how close him and Rouge actually were.

"Was it a secret?" Shadow asks with a bit of concern.

"Not anymore," Sonic replies through some laughter, "It's okay though. I was going to tell them eventually." The blue hero pulls away a bit so he can look down into Shadow's eyes again, "You know, you can always hang out with us. They're *your* friends too."

"I don't do well with your friends. I tend to make enemies with them rather quickly," Shadow says with a frown.

"That's not true," Sonic grins at him, "In fact, Cream was asking about you. Her chao really likes you. Maybe he can sense the chaos energy inside you."

Shadow rolls his eyes, “The thing would be attracted to you too then.”

“Oh,” Sonic says thoughtfully before remarking with, “Well, maybe you’re just good with animals.” Sonic snickers a bit and adds, “And girls apparently. You’d be a lady killer if you weren’t... uh...” Sonic stops himself with a sheepish look.

Shadow sighs and finishes, “If I weren’t gay.” It sounds so foreign coming from his tongue, but he supposes he’ll have to get used to it. “I’m also the Ultimate Life Form. I don’t get along with most men because they are threatened by me. The constant asserting of dominance gets tiring.”

Sonic frowns when he hears that and can’t help but feel guilty.

Shadow sees Sonic’s demeanor change and he looks confused by it. He places his hand on the other’s cheek and whispers, “You’ve never done that. You’ve teased and challenged me, but you always saw me as your equal.”

Sonic blurts out suddenly like he can’t contain it anymore, “I had Tails disable the device. I felt horrible after I thought about it. What I was doing didn’t really sink in until...”

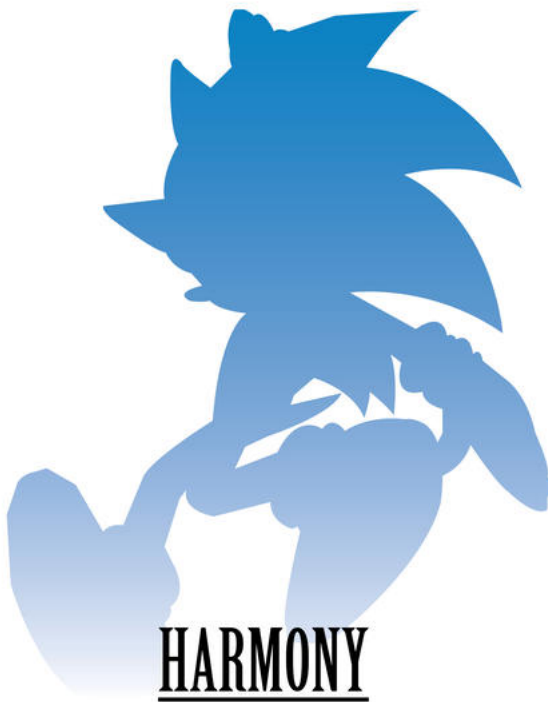
“It’s okay,” Shadow interrupts him, “I already know.”

Sonic grips Shadow’s hand with both of his and nuzzles close to his palm. He takes a moment to calm himself down. He wants to speak, but his heart is hammering so hard in his chest. One eye peeks out from Shadow’s hand before mumbling, “I trust you now, Shadow. I know you always keep your word. Even if the things you do are unconventional, I now know that you always have good intentions behind them. I promise to stand with you from now on.”

“Sonic...” Shadow sounds a bit astonished by that. He never thought he’d ever hear those words coming from the blue hero’s mouth. Somehow, it was the most meaningful thing he could ever be told. He pulls Sonic into a tight hug and holds him against his chest.

“Thank you.”

The Date



Chapter Six: The Date

Shadow wakes up the next morning with Sonic still in his arms. It's something so simple, yet so significant at the same time.

He's so used to seeing Sonic so energetic and spontaneous that it feels like he's watching something he shouldn't when he sees Sonic's calm, sleeping face. He still holds that boyish innocence, but it's more peaceful. It's a pleasantly quiet moment as he sees Sonic breathing slowly and the way his eyelids are closed delicately.

He diverts his attention back to the bird when he hears it chirping. He lifts his hand up to pet it, trying to calm it. Luckily, it settles down again and nestles back into its newspaper bedding.

Shadow rests his hand back on Sonic's lower back and he feels the blue hedgehog cuddle closer to him, burying most of his face into the white patch of fur on his chest. Shadow contains the low hummed laughs that only reach his throat and smooths a hand down one of Sonic's blue quills. He doesn't use the word much outside of mockery, but he feels like he could successfully categorize this moment as 'cute.'

It's a beautiful morning and he loses track of time completely. An hour or two must have passed and the sun has risen higher in the sky when he hears his radio come to life. He looks at the damn thing that's resting on the ground and wishes it would have gone off any other time but now. He quickly reaches over to shut it off, cutting off his commander's voice and curses himself when he feels Sonic stirring awake.

“Wha...?” Sonic looks up, dazed eyes slowly focusing. There may or may not be a trail of drool on his chin. He was sleeping. *Hard.*

Shadow suppresses an irritated groan, but gives Sonic a sympathetic look, “I apologize. Did that wake you?”

“Nah way. I was’lready awake,” Sonic slurs out with a dreamy look. He wipes his face and looks disgusted with himself when he feels the wet spot on the back of his hand. “Ugh! I’m sorry!” Sonic whips his body up with impressive speed and tries to smooth down the rumpled patch of fur he was using as a pillow.

Shadow takes his hand to stop him and pulls him down just enough to place a kiss on his lips. Luckily, the simple motion calms down the spastic hedgehog. “Don’t worry about it,” Shadow murmurs, “Although, I have to get going. The commander sounds rather angry.”

Sonic watches Shadow get up and he blinks a bit. He gives him a cocky grin soon after and comments, “I don’t know why you work for that guy. He always has his panties in a bunch.”

Shadow glances at him before responding, “He’s the only survivor from the ARK incident besides myself. We’ve both made mistakes in the past, but I’ve come to terms with it. As much as I don’t agree with many of his orders I still have great respect for him.”

“Right,” Sonic says sheepishly, “Well, if you ever get tired of all those rules and stuff you could always join the Freedom Fighters.”

Shadow lets out a small laugh, “I require a bit more structure and order in my life. I appreciate it though.”

The blue hero reaches his hand out to Shadow, but he’s already walking down the stairs. Sonic quickly follows after him and sees that Shadow is grabbing his green Chaos Emerald from the table. “You’ll come back, right?” Sonic spouts out a bit anxiously.

Shadow seems confused by Sonic’s reaction. He was planning on coming back, but the fact that Sonic was concerned about him not doing so made him feel strange. The closest feeling he could describe it is as... welcomed. “Of course. I need to report back here to see how far along Tails is with fixing Omega’s body. I also need to tend to the bird’s wounds,” Shadow explains.

Sonic frowns at the professionalism of it. He rubs his arm and smiles nervously, “For sure...”

Shadow raises an eyebrow to him, but doesn’t have much time to question the odd reaction. He needed to leave.

Seeing Shadow lift the Chaos Emerald over his head, Sonic glances over at the conveniently placed bowl of fruit on the counter and grabs an apple. He tosses it in the dark hero’s direction, “Catch!”

Shadow gets interrupted and skillfully reaches his hand out to catch the piece of fruit. He gives Sonic a quizzical look.

“An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” Sonic snickers as he shoots Shadow some finger guns.

“One can only hope,” is all Shadow says with a smirk before disappearing.

The moment Sonic sees the last flicker of light, he smacks himself in the face and cringes, “Wow, Sonic. That was cheesy even for you.”

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Shadow finally gets in contact with the commander and has them meet at an alternative building on the outskirts of the city. They get briefed about the current status of their base. Which it's pretty clear that it's demolished. Not only that, but Eggman has taken control of their robot army and drones. The only upside about HQ getting completely wrecked is that most of the overtaken robots were destroyed with it. Shadow is only half paying attention because he knows about the information firsthand. Although, he wonders if Omega's mind control has anything to do with GUN's machines getting compromised.

They're dismissed to get ready for their next assignments. Shadow and Rouge are handed keys for their new lockers and supposedly any items that were salvaged from the wreckage.

Rouge gasps loudly as she opens hers and her look of horror when she pulls out her dusty make-up bag is priceless. She opens her eye shadow/compact mirror combo and all that comes out is rainbow colored dust. "No! No, no, no!! I spent hundreds on these!"

"You should start applying your make-up at home then," Shadow suggests absently and opens his. There isn't much. He wasn't expecting much either. A few photos of Maria and the professor and the ARK. They were already pretty worn though from time. There's also a banged up gun, a torn box of bullets, and a jacket with the GUN logo on it that he never wears. He does notice two separate keys laying on the top shelf though. The one is for his motorcycle and the other he's not too sure of.

Rouge spots the key for his motorcycle and cringes, "That thing must be trashed."

Shadow just shrugs, "I have insurance on it. Maybe you should get insurance on your make-up kits. I'm sure they're much more expensive."

Rouge pushes him playfully, "Shut up. With that custom paintjob I doubt it."

"Hey," Shadow twists his face into a scowl, "I just don't want to go around sporting GUN merchandise."

She places her hands on her hips, "So, you made your own logo in hopes of getting your own recognition? Seems like you're a little jealous of your boyfriend."

Shadow glares at her from the corner of his eye, "Sonic doesn't need a logo. He just shows up and that's enough for people."

"Oh, come on," she says with a sigh as she drapes an arm around his shoulder, "It was a joke, hon."

"...Boyfriend," Shadow says like he's testing the word on his tongue, "Is that the correct terminology for it?"

Rouge erupts into laughter, "What do you mean!?"

Shadow seems a little hesitant now, "Should... I call him that? My boyfriend. He said we were a *thing*. I know we're together, but I'm not sure what that entails."

Her arm slips away and she sits heavily on the bench, "You boys are hopeless. Have you even been on a date with him yet?"

Shadow places a finger to his chin and thinks.

Rouge watches her partner go into deep thought and she has to stop it before the guy hurts himself,

“Good grief, Shadow. A night out. Some flowers. A movie. Maybe dinner. And depending on how far along in your relationship you are you either give him a kiss or do the horizontal tango.”

“Is that required?” Shadow asks with both confusion and concern.

“It stops your relationship from getting stale,” Rouge says in a bored tone as she rests her hand to her cheek, “That and it shows your significant other that you care and are thinking about them.”

Shadow shuts his locker and sits down next to her, folding his fingers together with a look of fretful pensiveness, “Perhaps I’ve been doing this all wrong. I wonder if he worries that I don’t care.”

Rouge’s eyes are so big they look like they’re going to pop out of her skull. Was this Shadow? The real Shadow? Her gloomy partner who never gave a damn about anyone’s feelings...considering the thoughts of someone else? She’s actually a little proud of him.

She pats him on the back a bit roughly and says with encouragement, “Sonic? Nah, he’s tough. Although, I’m sure it’d throw him for a loop if you showed up at his place with your motorcycle.”

Shadow nods as if it’s final and stands up, “Alright. I’ll pick up a new one after our shift is over.”

“Oh and hon?” Rouge says, getting up with him and smirking, “Don’t treat it like a mission, yeah? Try to have fun.”

“Understood,” Shadow responds, but falters when he realizes what he’s doing. He loosens up his posture a bit and corrects himself, “...Okay.”

Shadow follows Rouge out to retrieve their missions. It’s pretty barebones basic. Track down the compromised machines and take them down. They probably would have been called sooner, but GUN in general needed a few days to regroup.

Usually Shadow has a sarcastic remark to give, but he really didn’t mind the small vacation. That, and this mission was easy.

Rouge is able to pick up the slight frequency they’re omitting and Shadow is able to shut them off no problem. They don’t put up much of a fight anyway. Shadow finds himself getting a slight headache toward the middle of their mission, but it immediately goes away once their objective is complete. He disregards it and blames it on lack of sleep or his mind wandering. His nerves were kind of on overdrive lately.

Rouge sighs in disappointment when she sees the last one go down, “Such a waste of time. They could have called Delta Team to do this.”

“It’s fine. We’re down a teammate anyway,” Shadow explains a bit distracted.

Rouge smirks, “Oh? You’re usually the one complaining the most about this. Are you trying to get out of your duties early?”

“Of course not,” Shadow replies with a frown as he sees the sun going down.

“Mhm,” she hums out with a knowing look.

“I don’t have time to argue with you,” he replies with a grunt.

“I’m sure you don’t,” Rouge says with a sigh and hooks her arm around his, “Take us back to base, hero?”

Shadow rolls his eyes, but initiates Chaos Control anyway. They meet with the commander for their debriefing and Shadow is impatient with how long it takes to write down and identify all the machines they've recovered. He understands it's important that they find every single one, but he finds the paperwork pointless.

The moment they're done, Shadow glances up at the clock. It's just past seven. He feels his eye twitch when the commander stops him before he can leave.

"Yes, sir," Shadow still gives him his respects, but his eyes are sharp with agitation.

"I wanted to give you this," the commander says as he hands him some papers. As Shadow scans it over he explains, "It was brought to my attention you were living at HQ. We're required to accommodate for your living situation. Hopefully you've gotten your keys already. We've relocated you in an apartment in Westopolis for the time being. The address is on the document in your hands. Also, your vehicle was recovered and replaced. It's in a parking garage not far from your new home."

Shadow is speechless. He doesn't really know what to say. He just signs the documents stating that he's retrieved it. He makes eye contact with the commander and reluctantly thanks him. He knows he pulled some strings for Shadow and he doesn't like to be shown pity, but he knows better than to decline an offer from his boss.

"I'll see you at 0700 hours tomorrow, right?" The commander asks with knitted brows.

"Yes, sir," Shadow nods to him.

"And you'll answer your radio from now on," the commander states, making it clear that that was an order and not a question.

"Yes, sir," Shadow nods once more, looking away with irritation.

"Good. You're dismissed," the commander says, turning away not needing to add anything else.

Shadow turns away himself and glares when he sees Rouge waiting by the door for him. He walks past without addressing her.

"Someone got in trouble," she teases with a smirk.

Shadow just walks back to his locker so he can retrieve the keys, now knowing where they go. "I wouldn't say 'trouble.' Just a verbal warning," Shadow tells her.

"Ah... okay," Rouge says like she doesn't believe him, "What were you doing with blue that you couldn't answer the radio right away?"

Shadow drops the keys on the ground and glares at her before picking them up, "Get your mind out of the gutter."

She holds her hands up defensively, "I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I can tell you're taking it slow."

Shadow glances at her briefly before looking away with embarrassment.

She studies his face before it clicks, "*No.*"

Shadow clutches the keys in his hand and glares at her, wishing he could control the blush that's creeping up his face.

She sits on the bench with her legs crossed, giving Shadow her undivided attention, “So? Is he good? Give me all the juicy details.”

“You’re disgusting,” Shadow seethes with anger.

“Oh, come on,” Rouge pouts and uncrosses her legs, “We’re friends. Practically family. I just want to know if the world renown hero is as good in bed as he is at saving the world.”

Shadow starts emptying out his locker, but leaving the photos inside. He slips the gun and bullets in the pockets of his jacket, folding it neatly on the bench. He shuts the locker and gathers his belongings. It seems like Rouge isn’t going to get her answer until he stops and glances at her from over his shoulder, murmuring, “Better.” Before rushing out as quickly as he can.

Rouge’s face lights up with shock. She is so going to mess with him tomorrow morning about it. There was no running away from this conversation now.

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Shadow teleports into Westopolis and glances down at the address again. It’s a few blocks down, but he sees the parking garage across the street. He makes his way over to it. He climbs a few levels in search of his bike and stops when he sees it sitting in a lone parking space. He doesn’t expect to see his custom paintjob on it though. He was expecting a plain bike with a GUN logo slapped on.

He walks over in awe and runs his fingers across the brand new finish. If he wasn’t told that his bike had been destroyed, he probably wouldn’t have been the wiser. He wasn’t going to argue with it though. He stuffs his belonging in the small compartment in the back and gets on. He places his emerald in the slot on the dash and puts the key in the ignition. He checks the time and punches in the coordinates into his GPS before disappearing.

Why his palms feel sweaty as he makes his way to the front door of the familiar workshop he doesn’t understand, but he knocks on the door anyway.

The fox boy answers it and gives him a big smile, “You’re back! Ya know, you don’t have to knock. You can just come in.”

He’s aware, but the etiquette suggests otherwise. “Can uh… Sonic come to the door,” Shadow mumbles quietly.

“Sure,” Tails says cheerfully. He turns and shouts, “Sonic, can you come here for a sec?”

Shadow can hear Sonic’s voice call back from another room, “Can it wait, buddy? I’m like… in a boss battle right now and I’m kicking major butt!”

Tails folds his arms across his chest and grins when he adds, “It’s Shadow! He wants to see you!”

There’s a loud crash, followed by Sonic stumbling out into the living room area with a controller wrapped around his ankle. It trails behind him a few steps before he kicks it off. He visibly fixes his quills and walks over to the door.

Tails rolls his eyes, knowing when to leave and give them space.

Sonic leans against the door frame and grins at Shadow like he’s hamming up his flirtatious nature, “Sup, Shads? Long time no see.”

“I saw you this morning,” Shadow points out.

“Details,” Sonic says with a shrug. He looks over past Shadow and out at the motorcycle parked in the grass, “What’s with the bike? Want my lil bro to take a look at it?”

“No,” Shadow shakes his head and looks away, “I thought *we* could take a look at it.”

Sonic laughs a little, “Dude, you know I don’t know anything about machines.” He stares at Shadow for a long moment before his face falls. The two pieces connect in his head and his face turns bright red, “Oh! So uh... we’re goin’ cruising, huh?”

“That was the idea,” Shadow confirms with a nod.

“Sweet! Never been on a motorcycle. Never needed to. I’m like the fastest thing alive,” Sonic comments with a snicker.

“So I’ve been told,” Shadow says, finding himself shaking his head and smirking.

Sonic looks down and sees that Shadow is hiding something behind his back. He goes to sneak a peek and Shadow moves his body to guard it. He’s dying to know what he’s holding now. When Shadow wags his finger in front of his face though, Sonic is more determined than ever. He spins around quickly and reaches his hand out, but Shadow takes his wrist in a tight grip. Shadow spins him around in turn before presenting the gift to him.

Sonic’s mouth completely drops when he sees the bouquet of blue flowers. His eyes flick between the flowers and Shadow’s eyes before he asks, “Are those for me?”

Shadow shrugs a little, “Maybe. Only if you like them.”

“I love them!” Sonic shouts and scoops them up. He sniffs them and his emerald eyes sparkle to life, “I mean, granted I don’t know what they are, but I still love them.” He barrels back inside and places the flowers on the counter before frantically searching the cupboards for something to put them in. “Hey, Tails! C’mere!”

Shadow stands on the porch awkwardly and he slowly takes a step inside.

Tails appears from behind a closed door and makes his way into the kitchen, “Yes?”

Sonic is kneeling on the counter, with literally every cabinet door open when he asks, “Tell me what kinda flowers they are!”

Tails just looks confused, but he finally spots what Sonic is talking about. He walks toward it and looks over the bouquet before stating, “Oh! These are Forget Me Nots.” The fox boy pulls out a device and does a short search before further explaining, “According to the myth, two lovers came across this flower while walking along to Danube River. The man tried retrieving the flowers for his lover before getting swept away by the river and he told her not to forget him as he drifted away.”

Sonic stops his search briefly before glancing back at Shadow with wide eyes.

Shadow looks away and stands there awkwardly, “I... didn’t know the meaning. I picked them up last minute... They were blue and...”

Tails seems oblivious to them as he makes his way over to the bottom cabinet. He pulls out a vase and places it on the counter, “If this is what you’re looking for, you’re not going to find it up there, Sonic.”

The room remains silent as Tails prepares the flowers. Sonic’s eyes don’t leave Shadow’s and there’s

that slight look of terror on his face. Shadow remembers it from somewhere, but someplace locked away in his mind. Sonic's face full of agony crosses his mind again and he can recall Sonic reaching out for him.

Shadow is knocked out of his stupor when he hears Tails continue to explain something about the flowers, but he doesn't catch it. They're already clipped and in the vase.

When Tails does finally look over at Sonic, he gives him a questioning look, "You okay, Sonic?"

The distant look in Sonic's eyes immediately vanishes and he's hopping off the table. He pats Tails' head and smiles at him, "Oh yeah. Never better. Think you can hold down the fort while I'm gone?"

"Of course," Tails nods with confidence.

"Sweet. Go like... order a pizza or something with the money from our rainy day funds," Sonic replies as he saunters back to Shadow's side, trying to look suave.

"You mean the rainy day funds that are for *you* when *I'm* gone because you can't cook?" Tails states a bit snarky.

Sonic gives Tails a stiff look before pushing Shadow out the door in a hurry, "I uh... don't know what you're talking about! I'm entering a tunnel! I can't hear you!"

Tails shouts back with laughter, "That only works when we're talking to each other on communication devices! And I'm using the rainy day money just to spite you now!"

Sonic shrinks a little as they walk over to the bike. That was more than humiliating. It wasn't that he wanted Shadow to know he was good at cooking or anything. He already knew he was terrible, but he wanted to look like a cool older brother in front of him.

Although Sonic feels his heart stutter when he hears Shadow say, "The relationship you have with your brother is charming."

"Yeah! Ya know, we have each other's backs and all that," Sonic replies with a nervous laugh. Sonic doesn't really know what to do with himself when he gets over to the bike though. It's not that he's scared to ride it. He's done a hell of a lot more daring things. Most of those things have to do with jumping off the wing of the Tornado, but still. What's throwing him off a little is that there's only one seat.

Shadow eyes Sonic with a bit of concern before asking, "Is there anything troubling you?"

"Who? Me?" Sonic asks as he snorts, "No way! What gave you that idea?"

Shadow looks down at Sonic before stating, "Your posture is unusually closed off."

Sonic looks down at himself and how his arms are crossed over his chest. He unfolds them and gets into one of his well practiced victory poses before replying, "Nope! Perfectly fine!"

Shadow looks him over, knowing the blue hero probably wouldn't tell him. He understands that. He also has trouble speaking out about the things that bother him. He tries to crack the code, but his eyebrows shoot up in realization of what it could be. He makes his way around the back and pops open the compartment. He takes the items out of the pockets, tucking them away in the trunk, and pulls out his jacket before walking back over to the blue hero. He drapes it around Sonic's shoulders and waits for a reaction.

Sonic can't even give him a reaction at first. First the flowers and now he was giving him his jacket to wear? Shadow really was serious about this whole date thing. He holds it closer to his body and feels the faux fur on the hood tickle at his neck. He smirks up at Shadow and tries to break the tension a bit because Shadow's unblinking eyes on him are pretty intimidating, "Thanks, uh... Black's not usually my color, but that was really sweet of you."

"I don't know," Shadow says a bit thoughtfully as he helps Sonic's arms through the sleeves and zips it up along the front of Sonic's bare torso, "I think it's quite becoming on you."

Sonic feels his entire face heat up, especially when Shadow's fingers linger on the zipper a bit longer than they should. He swallows thickly when he sees Shadow step away instead of leaning in. He watches Shadow get on his bike and pat the empty space behind him. Sonic feels his heart going into overdrive, but he climbs on anyway. "So, uh... Can this thing even go fast? Or is it just for show?"

Shadow hooks his feet onto the pedals designed for his rocket shoes and glances at Sonic from over his shoulder, "For show? When has anything I've ever done been for show?"

Shadow had a point. Sonic's pretty sure the guy even has a tactical approach to brushing his teeth. Although, he's also getting some vibes that maybe he is showing off a little. Sonic smirks because he kind of likes that. "Oh yeah? Put your money where your mouth is," Sonic challenges with a cocky grin.

"I'd suggest holding onto something," Shadow says calmly as his shoes spark through the pedals and the engine roars to life. Before Sonic can get a snarky remark out, the tires are tearing through grass and they ride across the open area.

Sonic jerks back and if it weren't for the seat curving upward, he'd probably had fallen right off. Okay, so it's fast, but not too fast. He could totally outrun this thing. Or so he thinks until they boost forward with a loud boom. Sonic feels his eyes watering a bit and he swings his arms around Shadow's torso, hanging on for dear life. Yep, the thing goes fast. It just broke the sound barrier.

Shadow uses Chaos Control and they flash out of the area and reappear onto the streets in station square. The bike's tires skid across the asphalt and it slows down a bit to match the speed of traffic. Shadow glances over his shoulder with a smirk and remarks, "Oh good. You're still on."

"Okay, fine. You win," Sonic replies with a pout and rests his head against Shadow's back. He hates being proven wrong, but he had to admit that it was still pretty cool.

"No, I just proved your point," Shadow states as the street lights pass by them at a steady pace, "Let me prove mine."

Sonic raises an eyebrow when he sees Shadow looking back at him again. When Shadow motions his head out at the city lights around them, his eyes grow wider. Colorful neon and speckled lights dotting the sky remind him of stars. It was actually breathtaking. He's been here many times and sped right through it and never noticed before.

"Certain things you need to slow down to enjoy," Shadow says with a softness to his voice.

Sonic's arms tighten a little around Shadow's middle and a pleasant smile reaches his face. As he watches the electric art of the city etch itself into the darkness of the night. Sonic thinks that maybe this isn't the only thing Shadow is suggesting with his response. Their relationship started spontaneous and impulsive, but now it's lulled to something more gentle and genuine.

Sonic closes his eyes and enjoys the wind whipping around them and this moment feels infinite. It's

a new kind of freedom. The trust of someone else in control. It's new and exciting and a whole different kind of adrenaline rush.

They take the scenic route to their destination. Through the city and alongside the coastline where the city lights shimmer against the waves.

The bike slows to a stop against the curb and Shadow kicks down the kickstand. He looks down at the arms around his body and he feels that intense warmth bloom inside his chest. He places a hand on Sonic's and turns to ask, "So, what do you think?"

Sonic doesn't say anything. He just leans forward and tries to kiss Shadow from their awkward angle. He barely manages to get the side of his mouth, but neither seem to mind. Sonic feels Shadow shift and slip out of his arms as he gets off the bike.

Shadow stands on the side of his bike now and Sonic swings his legs so their dangling off one side of the seat. Shadow feels something inside him clench when he sees how Sonic looks with his jacket on while sitting on his bike. It feels like a temporary imprint of himself on the blue hero and the sadistic part of him enjoys the thought of it. He takes a step forward in between Sonic's legs and leans his head to the side as he kisses him deeply.

Sonic inhales sharply through his nose and lets his mouth meld together with Shadow's. Their tongues press and glide against one another. Sonic allows Shadow to lead this time and he kind of loses himself in sensation of Shadow being a bit rougher than usual. He whines a little when Shadow pulls away and Sonic feels like every nerve ending in his body is fizzling.

Shadow wipes the dampness away from Sonic's lips with his thumb and whispers, "I'll take that as a way of saying it sufficed."

Sonic snickers a little and pushes Shadow away playfully, "Are you kidding? All of this is amazing. I'm just not sure what I did to deserve it."

Shadow's face drops a little, "I don't understand."

Sonic holds his hands up defensively, "No! I like it. Don't think I don't. It's just... out of the blue?"

Shadow gives him a calculative look before placing a hand to the side of his face, "You're my boyfriend."

Sonic feels his heart seize in his chest. He isn't sure why that statement felt so bold, but coming from Shadow it kind of was. They never technically specified. Alluded to, maybe. But it seems so final now. And Sonic never thought he'd feel so blown away by being someone's... anything really. The thought of being tied down scares him, but with Shadow it feels like he can keep up with every step he takes. So, it feels more like a new adventure than anything.

Sonic leans forward and murmurs against his lips, "Yeah, I'm your boyfriend."

Shadow places a small kiss on the other's lip and grins with satisfaction.

That smile again. Sonic isn't going to point it out, but he wants to commit it to memory because it smolders his very being. The way Shadow's giving him that half-lidded gaze and powerful look in the depths of his fiery eyes makes the whirlwind in his chest intensify.

"Come on," Shadow beckons and holds his hand out to him. He helps Sonic off his bike and grabs his keys and his emerald before guiding him into a diner. He'd probably pick something a bit more classy, but he knows exactly what Sonic wants. Besides, he couldn't see Sonic in one of those

froufrou places where the napkins go into his lap. He could already see Sonic's panic as his hand hovers over the silver wear wondering which spoon is the soup spoon.

"Sweet! I haven't been here in ages!" Sonic shouts with a grin.

"I can't imagine *any* sit down eatery is somewhere you'd be," Shadow remarks as his hand brushes against the side of the other's.

Sonic looks down and then away as he holds Shadow's hand, completely taking the bait. "You know me," Sonic says with a laugh, "Always on the go. I'll make an exception for you though."

"Right," Shadow doesn't sound convinced, but he holds the door open for him anyway. As they are seated though and Shadow starts to hear murmurs from other tables, he sees why Sonic doesn't frequent sit down places. It's less about being on the go and more about being trapped in a single space with fans.

Shadow narrows his eyes at some of the patrons who are looking a little too long and luckily none come up to them.

Sonic rubs the back of his neck and tries to pretend like he doesn't know what's happening. He just looks over the menu absently until the waitress comes to take their order.

The waitress knows who Sonic is, but is relatively respectful about it so Shadow keeps to himself. Sonic hams up the conversation when he orders and he orders two chili dogs with a side of onion rings, sending the girl some finger guns and a signature grin. After she leaves, Shadow notes the way Sonic shrinks back a bit drained.

The blue hero doesn't let it get to him though because his attention is back to Shadow in an instant, "So, your bike. It must run on the Chaos Emerald's energy."

Shadow twirls his straw around the water glass in front of him and makes a face, "Not really. The pedals are custom fitted to hook up to my shoes. That's why it can reach the same speeds I would normally be able to. The emerald is mostly hooked up to the GPS. It can accurately pinpoint where my destination is. When I use Chaos Control without the tracking system, I can only reach places I've already been before or general areas."

Sonic seems really interested with Shadow's words when he listens, "Oh wow. So there *are* benefits of using it besides looking like a total badass."

"Missions mostly," Shadow states before adding with a smirk, "And picking up cute hedgehogs."

Sonic finds himself laughing and burying his face in his hands. When he slides them away, his face is red with a blush as he smiles at Shadow. "I can't handle you today," Sonic snickers as he shyly looks away.

Their food arrives shortly after and Shadow has a hunch the speedy service has to do with the waitress's need to impress Sonic. Although, Sonic's eyes don't even leave Shadow's when their food arrives. There's a look in his eyes too. One Shadow's only seen while they've been alone. It makes him wish they really were alone.

"Shadow."

The dark hero perks his head up a little when he hears his name.

Sonic has an onion ring in his hand and is trying to contain his laughter before leaning across the

table. He bops Shadow on the head with it and makes the ‘*Bring!*’ noise. Sonic bursts into hysterical laughter when he sees the stale look on Shadow’s face. “C’mon, Shads. Lighten up a bit,” Sonic says with a huge smile on his face.

Shadow glances down at the plate and then back up at Sonic. “Okay,” Shadow states a bit too professionally. He grabs one of the onion rings, eats half, and places it in front of his mouth like a smiley face.

Sonic completely loses it, banging on the table and all. His gut is even sore from laughing too hard.

Shadow hates how contagious Sonic’s laughter is though. He holds his hand over his face as he stifles back his own laughter. It’s low and controlled, but still there.

Sonic stops losing it for a moment so he can admire the rarity that is Shadow’s laughter. He rests his hand to his cheek and sighs contently, “You should laugh more often.”

“I don’t think so,” Shadow shakes his head, sipping some of his water to mask the fact that he’s still smiling.

“Awww...” Sonic pouts his lip out and sits back, “You’re no fun.”

“I’ll leave the laughing to you,” Shadow offers like it’s a fair exchange.

“Nope. I’m never laughing again, Shadow,” Sonic says, clearly being overdramatic. He places the back of his hand against his forehead like an melodramatic actor would and continues, “This is how I become an antihero. My boyfriend refuses to laugh with me and now I’ve turned to the dark side.” Sonic takes two onion rings and slips them around his wrists and pulls the faux fur hood closer to his chest to resemble Shadow’s and does an awful impression of the dark hedgehog in front of him, “I’m on a quest to find my own identity now. I’ll prove I’m the Ultimate Edge Lord. This, Shadow... Is WHO I AM!”

Shadow internally groans and wishes he never knew his 16 year old self. He sighs and massages his temples like he has a headache, “I deserve that. I put everyone through hell just so I could find out who I was. That was selfish, especially since none of it mattered. I was too focused on my past that I was so blind to see the future I had.”

Sonic’s fingers slip away from the hood and it slowly falls against his back again. He kind of feels bad for making fun of him now. “Sorry. I went overboard again,” he says as he rubs the back of his neck nervously, “You know I would have followed you and helped you no matter what, right? I knew that was important to you. I just hope you found the answers you were looking for.”

“Things are still hazy,” Shadow mumbles and crosses his arms across his chest, “but I’ve come to terms with the fact that my memories are so detached from who I was that I’m not even that person anymore.”

“Well,” Sonic reaches his arm out and offers him a reassuring smile, “Regardless if you’re that person or not... I still think he was really cool.” There’s a look of sadness that washes across his face as he looks into Shadow’s eyes longingly.

Shadow lifts his hand and watches their fingers twine together. He gives Sonic a look of appreciation as he whispers, “Thank you, Sonic.” Shadow taps the tip of his straw thoughtfully before taking another sip, “I must have been much different than I am now.”

Sonic shrugs and lets he memories come back to him, “Actually, not really. You were *definitely* rougher around the edges, yeah, but...”

“But...?” Shadow asks, waiting for the other to continue.

Sonic shakes his head and looks a bit awkward.

This sparks Shadow’s interest a little, “Did you have a crush on me back then?”

Sonic palm slides down to his face and he groans, “Don’t ask me that.”

“Is that what you seek in a significant other? Someone hell bent on overthrowing the world,” Shadow asks a bit mockingly.

“No. Well, I mean, it feeds my hero complex a little, but... No, I absolutely hated you at first. And, for the record, you didn’t want to overthrow the world. You wanted to go *kamikaze* on it,” Sonic points out with a smug look, “But once you stepped forward and did a complete 180, determined to save the world... That was really cool. I could just see it in your eyes. You loved the earth and the living things on it as much as I did. You wanted to protect it.”

Shadow feels his heart stutter in his chest. He places his hand against the rapid beating and feels this bizarre wave of nostalgia. The radiant glow of the earth from space. He remembers gazing out at it and being completely enraptured by it. He’s getting that same feeling looking at the blue hero in front of him. He swallows before saying, “In a lot of aspects, you’ve become my earth.”

That look again. Wide eyes tinged with fear.

Shadow holds his head and tries to remember. He slowly lifts his head when he sees Sonic frantically scrolling through his phone. He raises an eyebrow at him.

“There’s a movie my bro told me about! We should go see it! Action and adventure and stuff! He said it was really good,” Sonic says rather loudly as if it’ll mask whatever they were talking about before.

Shadow’s noticed Sonic gets like this every time they go a little too deep down memory lane. It would be just fine if Shadow could recall all of it. He doesn’t want to ruin the night by bringing it up though. So, he just sits and listens to Sonic go on about the movie. Shadow glances at the time and tries not to remind himself about having to wake up before 7am. He doesn’t mind though. Strangely, he could spend all night with Sonic and still deem it worth his time.

They finish eating and head out not long after. When they get back on his bike and Sonic’s arms instinctively wrap around his middle, he feels something between them getting closer.

When they get to the theatre after purchasing their tickets, Sonic immediately goes for the concession stand for popcorn. Shadow just rolls his eyes and follows suit. Although, he wished he’d stopped Sonic from getting it because the blue hero keeps throwing popcorn at him trying to get it in his mouth.

Shadow uses Chaos Control in order to capture a piece between his teeth in order to satisfy the hero. Sonic seems pleased by the action so he stops. It doesn’t stop Shadow from tossing a piece at Sonic’s head while he’s not looking once they find their seats though.

Sonic kind of freaks out because it gets trapped in between his quills leaving him ruffling them frantically until it finally falls out. He glares at Shadow, but it looks more like a childish pout than anything.

Shadow tells him that he shouldn’t be so vain before helping him smooth his quills back in place.

Sonic wails overdramatically about needing to keep his looks as a trophy wife so his rich CEO husband doesn't leave him for the younger, prettier woman at the receptionist desk.

Shadow just blinks at him like he doesn't understand. Although, he does lean in to kiss Sonic and reassures him he has no interest in receptionists. This just causes Sonic to burst into laughter because Shadow taking his jokes way too seriously are jokes in themselves.

The lights dim and the movie starts. Shadow just sits back and isn't really too interested in the plot. Or what little plot there is. His mind wanders back to the pier and how Sonic's arm was resting just behind him before wrapping around his waist. He glances over at Sonic who is completely engrossed in the movie and is tossing popcorn in his mouth. Shadow lifts his arm up a little, but lets it fall back down. He doesn't know why he's nervous about it. Surely he's done bolder things this night.

"Hey, Shads," Sonic is looking at him now with a grin before scooting closer to him.

Shadow takes that as a silent invitation. He wraps his arm around Sonic's shoulders and he feels Sonic rests his head against his chest. Suddenly, they're both less focused on the movie and more with the warmth that's growing between them. Shadow finds something tranquil and euphoric about it as he rests his head against the other's and sighs contently.

They stay like that throughout the duration of the movie and it's comfortable until the movie reaches its climax. Sonic's body stiffens when the hero on screen fails to save the damsel in distress. It's melancholy until it reveals that she hadn't died and she swoops in at the last second and rescues the hero. Shadow feels Sonic's body loosen when the credits finally rolls and the lights turn back on.

When they get up, Sonic is raving about how good the graphics were and how original it was that they made the hero's love interest part of the story instead of just something for him to earn. Shadow is just nodding along as he tosses the empty bag of popcorn in the waste bin. Shadow just comments that the main character was a doofus. To which Sonic replies that it was part of his character development, setting it up for a sequel that's already in production. Shadow doesn't know if he can sit through another movie like that, but the moment Sonic reaches to hold his hand he takes back that statement. He'd probably go see any movie as long as he gets to sit next to Sonic again.

As they head out and reach Shadow's bike, Sonic stops and smiles at him. He rubs his arm nervously as he says, "Tonight was amazing. I had a really good time."

A smile smoothes out across Shadow's face, "I'm glad."

"Are you coming back with me?" Sonic asks.

Shadow makes a thoughtful noise as he taps the screen to his GPS. It's past eleven. "I should go check on the bird," he murmurs with a concentrated look.

"Do you have somewhere else you need to be?" Sonic questions, not understanding Shadow's look of confliction.

Shadow looks up at Sonic and frowns. He places a finger to Sonic's chin and guides his mouth to his. Shadow kisses Sonic slowly before letting their lips part in a quiet smack, "Of course not."

One more day though. Omega's body should be done tomorrow by the time he gets back from HQ. He has to make his decision then.

They make their way back and Sonic helps him park his bike inside the garage area of the workshop. They quietly head inside and it's dark and silent, meaning Tails has long been asleep. Sonic eagerly guides Shadow up to the attic.

Sonic goes to wrap his arms around Shadow's neck and kiss him, but Shadow stops him. Sonic looks confused before Shadow turns to the bird and carefully brings it downstairs. He sets it on the counter, checks it over, and returns. Sonic goes to wrap his arms around Shadow's neck again and Shadow immediately pulls him in by the waist.

Shadow feels the moan against his lips before Sonic kisses him deeply. He gasps when he feels Sonic's hips against his. It's a haze of motions and darkness and moonlight. Sonic's eyes glisten with lust as they back up into the makeshift bed. Sonic pushes Shadow down against the seat and seethes into his mouth as their bodies align.

Shadow lifts his hand up and slowly undoes the jacket Sonic's wearing and exposes more and more peach flesh. He leans up and kisses a trail down his blushing body before nipping and sucking on the spot right where the jacket unclasps.

Sonic arches his back and claps a hand over his mouth to keep himself quiet. Shadow's tongue on his body feels really, really good. Sonic leverages himself up with his knees and lines himself up with Shadow before sinking down, feeling the delicious stretch. Sonic feels Shadow nuzzle into his torso and let out an unsteady breath of air.

"It never stops feeling incredible, does it?" Shadow whispers in awe.

Sonic just shakes his head. *No. Never.* His hips move fervently and quiet gasps leave his mouth with each buck of his hips. He feels Shadow's hands slide up his hips and he loves how secure the other's hold is. He lets Shadow help guide him up and down, but he angles his hips right where he wants it.

Shadow watches Sonic through half-lidded eyes, marveling at how willing Sonic is. He wants it. He wants *him*. And Shadow wants him just as much. Shadow feels the possessiveness he felt earlier rise up inside him as the jacket slowly falls away from Sonic's shoulders with each thrust. Shadow can't get over how gorgeous he looks.

"Shadow," Sonic croons out, trying to swallow a moan. One eye is looking down at Shadow before they both shut, as the waves of arousal ripple through his body. His hips slam down faster and his breaths get heavier.

Shadow grits his teeth as his fingers dig into his hips. His body meets Sonic's with each thrust and he can feel Sonic desperately trying to keep everything back. He pulls Sonic down and captures his mouth against his, helping to muffle the moans coming from his mouth.

Sonic pulls away just enough to mutter out, "I can't... I can't... If we keep this up..."

Shadow just nods once like he gets it. He pulls himself up and switches positions. He presses Sonic down against the seat and drives into him with more vigor. He presses his hand against Sonic's mouth to quiet him, feeling the delicious reverberations against his palm. Shadow fights with the desire of his own body, but agonizingly keeps it together until he feels it.

Sonic shuddering below him, writhing against the seat and coming undone. It's enough for Shadow to lose himself completely. He trails forceful kisses up Sonic's chest before biting back a moan against his shoulder. Shadow holds himself like that until the aftershocks lull into a calm afterglow in his body and he carefully unclasps his teeth. He looks down and sees the mark, giving Sonic a regretful look.

Sonic slowly comes down from his own high and places a hand on Shadow's, "It's okay." He gives him a reassuring smile and leans in to kiss him. When they part Sonic winks at him and states, "Just give me your jacket for a few days so I can hide it and we'll call it even."

Shadow leans down and licks the tender flesh on the other's shoulder before kissing Sonic deeply on the mouth. He feels Sonic's moan against his tongue and their lips part with a wet sound. "Whatever you desire," Shadow whispers lowly.

Sonic's cheeks heat up and he pushes Shadow's face away with embarrassment, "Don't say stuff like that, Shadow. You're gunna get me all riled up again."

Shadow chuckles darkly at the thought, but nods to him. He climbs off and lays next to him, basking in the afterglow. He takes Sonic's hand in his and rests it against his chest.

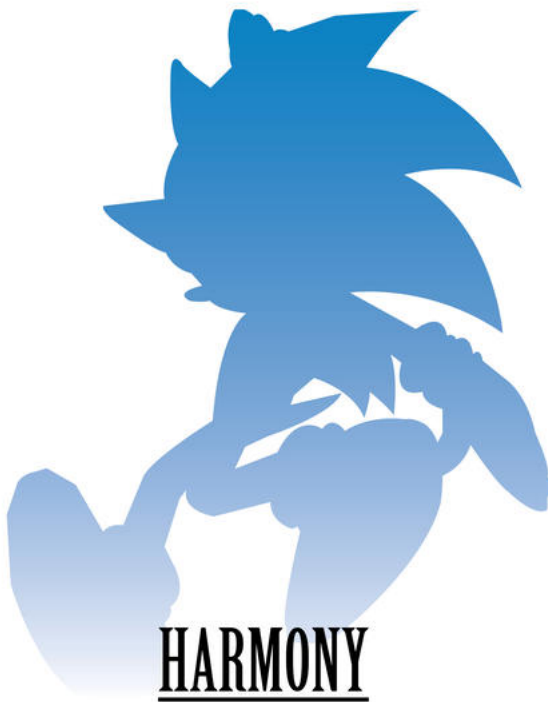
"Shadow," Sonic whispers, but closes his mouth as he looks down at their hands together.

"Yes?" Shadow asks absently.

Sonic goes to open his mouth, but then closes it. He shakes his head. He just cuddles closer giving him a blissful smile, "Nothing."

Shadow just nods and lets his eyes slip shut. He wraps an arm around Sonic's body and rests his chin on the top of Sonic's head before giving into his blissful fatigue and falling asleep with Sonic fitted perfectly against his body.

Rifts & Teamwork



Chapter Seven: Rifts & Teamwork

The sun is just rising when Shadow opens his eyes to hear the soft beeping of his alarm. He pulls his glove down and turns off the device before looking down and seeing the blue hero in his arms. He doesn't want to get up, but he knows he has to. He knows the commander said 7am, but he should be there at least 15 minutes early to make up for the morning prior.

He manages to slide away without waking the sleeping hedgehog and just watches Sonic for a moment. The morning sunlight beaming in the small attic window makes him look almost angelic in a way. Shadow smiles softly and leans in to kiss Sonic's head. He takes the sheet and wraps it around the sleeping hero before carefully walking down the steps to the kitchen.

The bird is awake on instinct and Shadow makes his way over to it. It nuzzles its head into his finger and Shadow smiles down at it sadly. He whispers to it, "Last day, Omega... I hope I make the right choice." He waits, almost pleading for the creature to speak or at least give him some sort of sign.

Nothing.

Shadow sighs and grabs his keys and emerald. He takes his motorcycle to work so he can park it at HQ until his mission is over.

He walks into the small, temporary building to the aroma of coffee. Shadow wishes he'd picked something up before getting here because he feels a little rundown today. He doesn't like the machine at work because it's a breeding ground for other agents and he knows better than to get caught alone with any of them. At least while Rouge isn't here. He's the first one to show up to the

meeting room, besides of course the commander himself, and gazes out the window. It's a gloomy day. Grey skies. What he wouldn't give to just have a hint of blue today...

"Someone had a late night," Rouge snickers as she takes a seat next to him.

"I'm here, aren't I?" Shadow grumbles, although it's muffled from where he's pillowing his face into his arms.

"Of course you are. Had to make up for yesterday, you Ultimate Ass-Kisser," Rouge teases. She doesn't see Shadow react to that and she frowns. "I'm sorry," she apologizes.

Shadow just side glances her like there should be a catch as to why she's apologizing to him so easily for that.

"No, I mean it," she assures him, "Must be hard as a young lover to leave your significant other in the morning."

"Young lover?" Shadow asks like he's offended for her, "You act like you're an old hag. You're twenty. You're only two years older than me."

"Actually, if you want to get technical, you're older than me. The fifty years of whatever," Rouge waves her hand like she's doesn't even want to fathom the math.

"Maybe... but I was in stasis for those years. My mind is still 18," Shadow points out, already getting bored of this topic.

"Whatever," she says, brushing it off. She leans in closer to him and rests her hand to her cheek, "Please, tell me you did the flowers, the dinner, the whole shebang."

Shadow looks away, but a small smile creeps across his mouth, "I did."

Rouge smiles happily with stars in her eyes, "That's my Shadow. An ordinary gentleman."

"Naturally," Shadow smirks at her a bit more confidently.

"I raised you right," Rouge jokes as she pats him on the back.

Shadow doesn't say anything. He knows it's a joke. It wasn't the first time she's said it and it won't be her last. He doesn't mind it either though. She's at least helped shape him into the current version of himself. So, he's grateful.

Once the meeting starts, all Shadow can think about is how he could be sleeping right now. Or more accurately, laying next to Sonic watching him sleep. Maybe there was some truth to Rouge's previous statement.

It takes a good hour getting briefed on the GUN patrol bots that are still missing. They're disabled so they're harder to track down. But there are waves of activity here and there.

Shadow's head does perk up when he hears the commander talk about how Sonic's team has been taking them down as well when they pop up unannounced. Shadow can only assume Knuckles was the leader of last night's raid in Sonic's place since they were together.

After the meeting is over and they're assigned their missions, Rouge and Shadow head out. The central part of the city has a few drones, but they go down easy enough. Shadow even wonders if the doctor is trying anymore. Something tells him that's not the case though. Failed experiments are

probably more of what they are. He just wishes he knew what that madman was planning.

Shadow is surprised when he gets an emergency radio call from HQ in the middle of their assignment. He gets the coordinates and the duo head out.

As their running though, Rouge spots something in her peripheral vision. She smirks and turns to Shadow, "Looks like we have some competition."

Shadow raises a brow at her before he follows her eyes up. Zipping alongside them, jumping from building-to-building is the blue blur himself. He hasn't noticed them yet and he has a determined look plastered on his face.

"Oh, and I wonder where he got that jacket from," Rouge says like she doesn't already know the answer.

Shadow disregards her statement with a huff.

It isn't long until he spots the two trailing significantly farther behind the blue hero. The two tailed fox flying with his tails spinning like a helicopter. And the red echidna running, jumping, grabbing onto the side of buildings with his spiked gloves, and hopping back up.

Shadow glances at his partner with a smirk, "Looks like his little friends are with him as well."

Rouge's eyes are sparkling like diamonds when she sees Knuckles scaling the buildings. She plays it off like it's no big deal though and asks, "What are your orders, team leader?"

"Change of plans. We fall back, observe for a weakness, and come in for the kill," Shadow informs her.

"Won't they be pleased," Rouge snickers.

"Hey, that's *our* assignment. They'll have to pry it from my cold, dead hands," Shadow points out, feeling his heart beat eager with excitement.

Rouge is about to say how she loves that Shadow's rivalry with Sonic hasn't changed a bit, but he's already running ahead of her. She floats on a current instead, getting an aerial view of her own target.

Sonic sees the clearing and the mech they've been hunting down. He jumps high off the building and sticks the landing.

The machine is definitely one of GUN's, but one that would normally be piloted by someone. Except in the pilot seat, the small rabbit girl is trapped inside and banging on the thick glass. Her chao is hooked up to the center piece and it looks as if the mech is being run on its energy.

"Don't worry, Cream. We'll get you out of there. Just hang tight," Sonic reassures her with his trademark grin and a thumbs up.

"Thank you, Mister Sonic, but I'm more worried about Chocola!" She cries out to him feeling a bit more relieved to see him, though her voice is muffled by the thick glass around her.

Sonic hears his two friends land beside him and he smirks back at them, "Glad you could show up."

Knuckles beats his large fists together and glares at him, "Sorry. Not everyone was built with super speed."

Tails is typing away on his device as he informs Sonic, "This must be another mech being controlled

by Eggman. It's piloting itself and draining the energy from the chaos."

"Eggman, huh?" Sonic gives the robot a cocky grin before taking a step forward, "I know you can hear me, Egg-head! Show yourself! You're not fooling anyone by taking over GUN robots! Unless you're just too *lazy* to make your own bots now!" Sonic waits for a response, but there is none. Eggman usually wants the last laugh and it's just an easy taunt to get him to rear his ugly face.

Sonic turns to Tails and silently waves for him to back down before turning to Knuckles. When he sees Tails reluctantly shy away he holds his hand out to Knuckles, "Throw me at the robot and aim for the cockpit."

Knuckle glances between Sonic's face and his hand before cracking his knuckles with a grin, "With pleasure." He takes Sonic's arm in a tight grip, swings around a few good times before letting go and tossing him at the robot.

As Sonic flies through the air, he gives Cream a confident look before ducking into a tight ball and spinning as he's launched at the glass casing. The glass slowly chips and cracks until it eventually shatters. Sonic reaches his hand out and grabs the rabbit girl's hand.

She in turn pulls Sonic up by flapping her ears, both of them nearly missing the giant arm that swings up. Although, the wind current from it causing Cream to jerk backwards. They land in the robot's massive hand and just as the robotic fingers come down, Sonic lifts his arms to try and keep them open. He looks down at Cream and tells her, "Get out of here. I'll be fine."

The rabbit girl nods and flies away. She stops midway and gasps when the giant metal fingers wrap around Sonic's body. She cries out desperately, "Mister Sonic!"

Tails flies up behind her and guides her out of danger, "Don't worry. We'll get him out of there." He turns to the red echidna, "Knuckles! Help Sonic!"

"Got it," Knuckles nods and burrows underground.

Sonic tries to push the hand away from his body, but he can't force it open with his strength alone. He looks up and sees that Cream and Tails are out of danger. He tries to spin dash his way free, but it isn't working. He looks down at the core of the mech and the armor is glowing with a strange aura. If he had to guess chaos energy from the chaos.

Knuckles launches himself up from the ground and smashes his fists into the robot. Usually he'd be tearing through something like this, but he's barely making a scratch. He turns his attention back to Sonic and jumps onto the large robotic hand. He helps pry open the hand so Sonic can finally wiggle free.

The other large arm comes down to swat them like a bug, but Sonic grab ahold of Knuckles and speeds away. They tumble onto the ground and Sonic helps up his echidna friend.

"This one is a lot tougher than the other ones we've fought," Knuckles comments with a frown.

"No kidding," Sonic replies and smirks at him, "But what fun would it be if there wasn't a challenge?"

The mech's breast plate opens up and instead of bullets shooting out from them, they're electrical rays of light. They rain down on the two heroes. Sonic manages to dodge the first round, but Knuckles gets hit and his muscles seize up.

"Knuckles?" Sonic asks as he dodges the sparks of light making his way over to him. Knuckles is

completely paralyzed. Sonic goes to grab his teammate's stiff body, but he gets hit with the next round. Sonic's eyes widen in shock before his body seizes as well and is more terrified by the fact that the effects feel just like Shadow's Chaos Spear attack.

The large robot makes its way over to its paralyzed foes and whips its arms down to crush them. The large fists meet concrete, cracking it on impact. When it pulls its hands back up and the dust settles, the two heroes aren't crushed under it.

There's a flash of green light and Shadow appears with both Sonic and Knuckles by his side.

Sonic feels his muscles slowly relaxing back into place when he stiffly turns to Shadow, "That's just like you to come in for the trademark last minute save."

"And it's just like *you* to put yourselves in immediate danger," Rouge says as she swoops down from the sky and pulls Knuckles into a deathly strong hug. His muscles are still stiff from the attack and his joints are popping with the crushing hug.

When Knuckles is free, he's surprised by just how loose his muscles feel now. He stretches his arm a little and addresses Shadow with a mumble, "Thanks... or whatever."

Shadow is just as stubborn when he replies, "You're welcome, I guess." His gaze falls down to Sonic and offers him his hand.

Sonic takes it and pulls himself up with Shadow's help, "What took you so long?"

Their fingers linger together longer than normal as Shadow replies sternly, "I was merely observing."

Sonic smirks and leans in a little, "Yeah? Like what you see?"

Shadow rolls his eyes and slips his hand away from Sonic's, crossing his arms across his chest, "Your sloppy battle tactics are hardly worth observing. I was pinpointing weaknesses in *our* target."

Sonic just laughs and places his hands on his hips, "Oh, I'm sorry we stole the show. Didn't know GUN had dibs on this one."

"That's funny," Shadow sneers, "Considering you and your teams have been taking them down and leaving the remains for us to collect."

"I know, right? Weird. It's almost like the leader of the Freedom Fighters is trying to make GUN's alpha team leader's job easier," Sonic retorts playfully.

"Alright you two, leave the flirting until after you've clocked out. We have a rescue mission on our hands," Knuckles has to interject or the two will be going like this for hours.

The two kind of look away a bit embarrassed.

Knuckles continues, "I wasn't aware GUN was making robots that could shoot out lasers that stun their enemies."

Shadow raises an eyebrow, "We... don't."

"I don't think it's the machine. I think it's absorbing the chaos energy from Cream's chao. The attack is similar to Shadow's Chaos Spear," Sonic explains.

Shadow and Rouge exchange a look. He motions his head to her and silently indicates that she follow his lead. They make their way back to the clearing and toward the robot.

“If I distract it, do you think you’ll be able to get close enough to the pilot seat and rewire the control panel,” Shadow asks her.

Rouge salutes to him and smirks, “That’s my specialty.”

Shadow nods and watches her soar up into the air, circling around the robot like a greedy vulture waiting for an opening. Shadow skids and skates toward the robot’s arms, giving them a target to lock onto. He dodges and teleports and almost wishes he had Omega’s help right about now. He could use the extra strength.

He tries not to think about Omega though. It’s only proving to be a distraction for himself.

One of the large arms comes crashing down and Shadow braces himself. He catches it on its decent, but falls on one knee caving into its strength. Just as he’s about the bail and use his Chaos Control, he feels it slowly lifting up again. Shadow turns and sees Knuckles helping him.

Knuckles gives Shadow a stubborn look before he says, “I’m helping Rouge. Not you.”

“Fair enough,” Shadow remarks, relieved either way.

The chest plate opens once more and lock onto the two, but it wavers a little. It instead locks onto Sonic who is trying to get its attention and sticking his tongue out at it. The spears of light go flying at Sonic, but he’s faster and dodges them easily.

Shadow eyes the attack and there was no doubt about it. That was his Chaos Spear. He doesn’t want to know what other attacks this thing has of his or why it’s programmed to do that. He just needs it shut down. Now.

Rouge swoops in when she sees an opening and one of the large arms comes crashing down. Shadow grits his teeth and lets go, trusting Knuckles can hold it up for the moment, and shoots a Chaos Spear of his own at it.

The arm stops and sparks midair and Rouge looks taken off guard a moment. She winks at Shadow... or maybe Knuckles? Then soars into the cockpit the soonest chance she can.

Shadow nods and sees this and braces his hand back onto the arm. He turns to Knuckles and says, “Rouge is in.”

Knuckles nods back.

Shadow takes Knuckles’ arm and warps them from underneath the robotic arm. They appear safely in front of the mech, next to Sonic. The hero gives them a thumbs up.

Rouge flies out of the pilot seat and swoops down next to them. “I jammed the controls, but...” She says with a frown.

That didn’t sound like good news. “But...?” Shadow asks.

“I don’t know how, but I think the chao is controlling it,” Rouge explains.

Mind control? Again?

“Looks like the only option we have is to extract the energy source,” Shadow grits out. He turns to Rouge and holds his hand out.

She nods and takes it, flying him overhead. She twirls around quickly, rivaling that of a tornado and

kicks Shadow down, aiming at the core of the robot.

Shadow curls himself into a ball and smashes into the glass container holding the chaos. It doesn't even scratch the surface and he's propelled back. Just as he's about to land hard on his back, Rouge swoops down and grabs him again.

"You okay?" She asks with concerned.

"Once more," Shadow orders.

She just nods and performs the attack once again.

As Shadow comes in contact with the core, he spins as rapidly as he can. Sparks fly, but he can't seem to break through.

A blur of blue streaks through the air and joins Shadow in trying to break through the barrier. It finally gives and cracks. Although, the moment it does there's an explosion of red.

Shadow gasps and throws himself in Sonic's direction and teleports them away immediately.

Rouge is thrown back from the explosion, but Knuckles jumps up and catches her before she can hit the ground.

Shadow lands with Sonic tucked under his arm and they both watch the large explosion slowly dissipate. Shadow watches it with slight fear.

"Was that Chaos Blast?" Sonic asks as he looks up at Shadow.

Shadow nods slowly.

Sonic stands up confidently and grins at the robot, "Maybe it's time we fight fire with fire."

Shadow looks up at him in confusion.

"I'll give you my energy," Sonic holds his hand out for Shadow and smiles down at him, "Like last time."

Last time. They performed Chaos Blast together. It might just work.

Shadow takes Sonic's hand and smirks up at him as he pulls himself up, "Only if you're sure."

"Am I sure?" Sonic asks with a sputter of his lips, "Dude, I'd be honored! Let's take down this bucket of bolts!"

Their hands remain together as they run forward. Their legs sync up until Sonic's go into overdrive and Shadow's go into a brisk skate. They boost forward, Sonic's blue aura melding together with Shadow's yellow to create something of a green/teal coloration, before ramming right into the robot. The large bot goes down with a crash and the two flip into the air, landing on its core. Shadow connects his emerald with Sonic's palm and feels Sonic's energy surge inside him.

He locks eyes with Sonic and Sonic's emerald eyes are shining back. He nods once to Shadow with a determined look.

"Chaos..." Shadow says as the aura builds up around them and just as he releases it he shouts, "Blast!" The explosion is intense and the energy tears itself out of his body. The pressure causes the small crack in the robot's core to expand more and more until finally it shatters.

“Alright...” Sonic pants out when he sees that it worked. He places a hand on Shadow’s cheek to get his attention, “That’s enough.”

Shadow grits his teeth as he tries to quell his body. The energy reverts back inward and it’s too sudden and too fast. He drops to one knee and looks down at the chao. It’s completely drained, but still breathing. Shadow picks it up with shaky arms and lets Sonic assist him off the dented robot. The concrete around them is singed and blackened from the blast and Shadow’s reminded of why he doesn’t use that attack often. It’s too destructive and hard to control. But somehow, with Sonic’s help it seemed manageable.

“Chocola!” Cream cries out and flies over to Shadow. She holds her hands out and lets Shadow gently place the chao into her arms. She cradles it carefully and gives Shadow a grateful look, “Thank you so much, Mister Shadow.” She turns to Sonic next, “Mister Sonic.” Tears form in her eyes when she finishes, “Everyone.”

Shadow places a hand to the girl’s head and smiles down at her. His hand flinches away and he closes his eyes tightly. Something’s ringing in his ears. It’s so loud. He stumbles back and holds his head. He opens his eyes and is greeted to blackness. He blinks his eyes a few more times to make sure they’re actually open, but nothing changes.

He can hear footsteps. Frantically running. They echo through his mind like they’re coming from a long corridor. They stop and just when he thinks it’s over there’s a loud bang of a gunshot. He falls to his knees and starts to hyperventilate. The ringing gets louder.

“Shadow...”

He can’t look up. He knows what he’ll see when he looks up. He can feel the warm blood pooling around his knees.

“Shadow... Please...”

Shadow clutches his eyes shut tight and shakes his head. No, he doesn’t want to look up.

“Shadow!”

Shadow opens his eyes when he hears it this time. His eyes lock with blue ones. He focuses and refocuses his eyes when he realizes they’re Tails’ eyes not...

“Are you okay, Shadow?” Tails asks with concern. He turns to Sonic with a frown, “He’s not reacting to visual responses.”

Shadow holds his head and groans, pulling himself away from the fox boy. He’s trying to get his bearings on what happened. He’s still in Station Square so he must have only clocked out for a moment or two. Which is good. He stands up and fumbles back a little. He can feel Rouge ease him back onto stable footing. “We should radio GUN and have them pick up this mech right away,” Shadow tells her a bit groggily.

She nods to him, “That’s no problem, but you should take it easy for a minute.”

“Actually,” Tails pipes up and gets to his feet, “Might I suggest bringing it back to my workshop? That way I can do a diagnostic and figure out why...”

“No,” Shadow shakes his head once sternly, “That’s property of GUN. We’re held accountable for every rogue robot.”

“Like hell you are,” Knuckles steps up and gives Shadow a challenging glare, “What good is bringing it back to GUN? They’re just going to lock it up. Let Tails take a look at it first.”

“This is our assignment. We can’t leave without it. So, back off,” Shadow states as calmly as he can.

Knuckles turns to Rouge expectantly.

Rouge just raises an eyebrow, “What do you want me to do? It’s his word over mine.”

“But you would let us take it,” Knuckles points out.

She scratches the back of her head and looks like she wants to stay out of it.

Everyone then turns to Sonic. The blue hero looks at each of them in surprise. He turns away sheepishly and taps his finger to his chin thoughtfully.

“You’re not actually considering it!” Knuckles shouts to him in disbelief.

“W-well... I... uh...” Sonic tries to say, but he can’t form the words properly.

“If it were any other team. Any other GUN agent besides Shadow, you’d be behind us in a heartbeat,” Knuckles explains as he gets into his face, “As the leader of the Freedom Fighters, you need to get your priorities straight!”

Sonic keeps a cautious smile on his face as he says, “I mean, maybe... this time... It’s out of our jurisdiction?”

Knuckles stomps his foot on the ground and growls, “Jurisdiction!? Are you listening to yourself!? We’re the Freedom Fighters! We don’t have a jurisdiction! What happened to all that talk of riding with the wind and doing what you think is right no matter what!? Or was all that just a bunch of hot air!?”

Tails is looking at Sonic with a look of confusion, “I’m just surprised you even know what the word jurisdiction means.”

Sonic raises his hands up defensively, “Guys, come on...”

“No, I want to know,” Knuckles demands as he pokes at the GUN logo on Sonic’s jacket roughly, “Are you working for *them* now!? You spend a few days with Shadow—which no one asked you to do because we needed our leader at the base—and you’re letting him dictate your life!?”

“It’s not like that, Knux,” Sonic tries to explain.

“Isn’t it?” Knuckles asks as he folds his arms across his chest, “I’ve had to step up and give orders and lead our teams the past couple days while you’re on ‘vacation.’ We’ve been doing pretty damn good too. We’re starting to question whether or not you’re taking your leadership duties seriously.”

Sonic rolls his eyes, “Right. And Cream gets captured under your command.”

“Yeah,” Knuckles nods, “because you won’t let Cream, Tails, or Amy do anything. Tails is intelligent, strong, and pretty fast and Amy is *strong*. Yet, you keep pulling them from tough missions. You don’t let anyone *grow* as a fighter. You deem someone weak and that’s it.”

“I just don’t want anyone getting hurt,” Sonic states.

“We’re only as strong as our weakest members! You can’t always rely on me because you want to

protect your 'lil bro.' You don't think it's putting a strain on us?" Knuckles retaliates.

Tails lifts his finger and passively tries to add, "I mean... It wouldn't hurt to give me orders. I can be useful."

Sonic gives Tails a hard stare when he says, "We'll talk about this later." He turns his attention back to Knuckles when he sees Tails shy away. "Knuckles, you need to chill. Why don't you take a weekend off. I hear Emerald Coast is beautiful this time of year. I'll be back at base first thing tomorrow morning. Then, we'll take down everyone's complaints and work it out," Sonic explains coolly.

Knuckles pushes Sonic back and snarls, "No, I'm sick of you putting things off! I want you to take this seriously for once!"

Sonic stumbles back and feels Shadow's hand on his back, stabilizing him. He sees Shadow about to step forward and the blue hero holds his arm out to stop him. He exchanges a sharp glare with Shadow and stands up straight again. He dusts himself off and calmly walks back over to Knuckles, "I don't want to be a leader that rules over everything with an iron fist, Knux. This team is about freedom and I allow everyone to do as they please."

"That's bullcrap and you know it," Knuckles seethes as he beats his fists together.

"Fine," Sonic says with a frown, "Want me to take this more seriously? I will." It looks like the two are about to duke it out when Sonic whips his hand up. His finger is pointing up and out of the city when he says, "As the leader I *order* you to escort Cream and Tails back to base. You have two options after that point: You either stay and wait for me to get back or take the Master Emerald and go back to Angel Island. Do I make myself clear?"

Knuckles' lip curls around a snarl, looking completely betrayed, "And what are *you* going to do?"

"I'm going to stay here and wait for GUN to pick up this bot," Sonic responds with an unflinching look, "Then, if you're still there when I get back, we're gunna have a chat."

"You know, I expected you to trust Shadow over me, but I never thought I'd see the day you trust him over your own brother," Knuckles says lowly before he turns to walk away. "Come on, guys," Knuckles says a bit softer as he guides the two away.

Tails looks back at Sonic once with a frown before walking off with Knuckles.

Sonic's back is facing Shadow, so he can't get a good read of him. He takes a step forward and before he can place a hand on his shoulder, Sonic turns around to him with a big smile. Shadow looks confused by this.

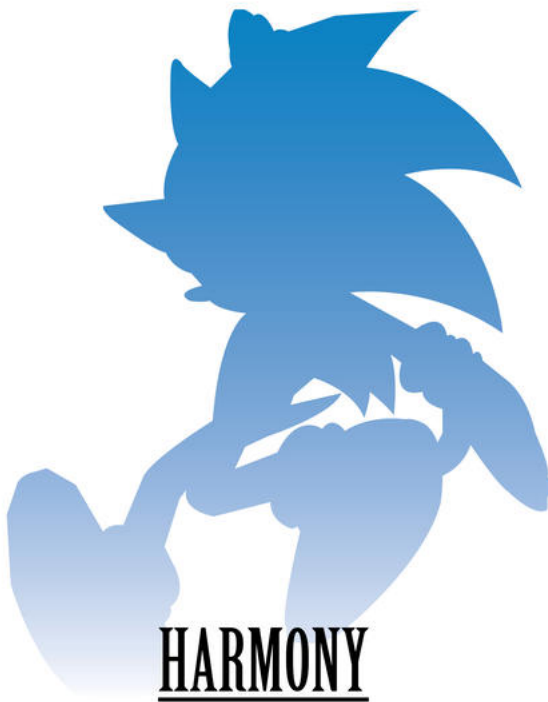
"Man, I hate doin' that stuff. I feel like that took two years off my life," Sonic announces with a laugh as he makes his way over to the charred remains of the robot.

Rouge smiles at Shadow and murmurs to him, "Thick skin. What'd I tell ya. He'll be okay."

Shadow's frown deepens as he observes Sonic goofing off and kicking a few metal pieces of debris. It sure seems like he's back to his old self, but he wonders. He was sure that would strike a nerve with the blue hero. Especially since his team is everything to him.

For the first time in awhile, he feels awful for having to follow through with his orders. He's starting to question his own morality.

Good-bye



Chapter Eight: Good-bye

It's awful how tedious it is for GUN to cart their asses over to the scene and pick the thing up with a chopper. That's just coming from someone like Shadow who could have transported it in an instant using Chaos Control. Apparently the commander doesn't want GUN property transported that way for 'insurance purposes.' All of it should be a pain, but watching Sonic poke fun at all the agents and the commander himself is pretty humorous. Shadow keeps a professional attitude though, but it doesn't stop him from observing. It's not like the commander can do much about it anyway. Sonic doesn't work for him.

After the blue hero leaves, that's when things drag though. Because the damn thing has Shadow's powers, Shadow has to file an entire report about it. Not like he knows anything other than the doctor is most likely behind it. Shadow wasn't a paperwork kind of agent. He was more of the kicking the crap out of anything that moves kind.

Luckily, Rouge comes by toward the end of the day and helps him fudge it. She's good at making a ton of words that mean nothing sound important and valuable.

"You're coming by the workshop tonight, right?" Shadow asks carefully as he watches Rouge slip the papers neatly into a folder and toss it on the commander's desk.

She stops and lets Shadow's words sink in. She nods and says, "Of course, hon. I just need to stop by the hero's base to make sure Knuckles didn't run back to his island."

Shadow smirks, "Need to make sure he didn't run off with your emerald?"

She winks at him, "You know it."

Shadow sees her face fall after she makes the joke though and he asks, "Something wrong?"

"It's silly," Rouge says, trying to brush it off.

"Try me," Shadow replies as he crosses his arms across his chest.

"I just wish you two would get along. I know it's not all your fault either. He's very bullheaded, but he's very kind under that rough exterior. You two might actually have more in common than you think," she explains thoughtfully.

Shadow shakes his head, "I doubt it."

"You really think so?" She asks.

"Look, if he wants to talk to me about something, then he should do it. I'm not wasting my time with someone who only sees me as a threat," Shadow explains with a frown.

She sighs, "That's not it. It's just... hard. I love both of you and neither of you are connecting well. It's almost like you two are trying to make me choose and I don't want that."

Shadow watches her walk past him and he frowns, wondering what she meant by that. He honestly doesn't have the mental capacity for it right now anyway. He figures they'll meet later so he drops it.

Shadow makes his way back to the parking garage to get his bike, but seems taken aback by what he sees.

Sonic is laying across it with one leg propped up against the dash and his head pillowed by his arms. He's seen Sonic in this lazed position before, but for some reason it's quite enticing in this situation. Especially when he sees one of Sonic's eyes slowly open and a grin spreading across his face.

"How valiant of you to wait for me," Shadow taunts as he steps in front of the lounging hedgehog.

Sonic's one eye is still looking up at him with a half-lidded gaze, "I don't usually wait for people, but I'll make an exception for you."

Shadow leans down, purposefully resting his hand on the seat right between Sonic's legs, and hovers his face inches away from Sonic's, "I'm honored."

Both of Sonic's eyes open when he senses Shadow's hand. He can see the lust burning in Shadow's fiery eyes and he likes it a lot. He stretches his arms up a bit higher as the jacket slides up his torso, revealing the small hickey hiding there.

Shadow sees it and he knows the action was purposeful. "You little tease," Shadow murmurs as he presses his thumb into the sensitive mark.

Sonic's eyes slip shut and he lets out a quiet noise.

Shadow goes in to press his lips against Sonic's, but he realizes where they are and how inappropriate it is. Instead, he pulls away and lets out a level breath to cool himself down.

Sonic pouts at him and pulls himself up to a sitting position, leaving enough room in front for Shadow, "You're no fun."

Shadow just gets on the bike and places the emerald in the compartment before putting the keys in

the ignition, "If you were looking for *fun* in a significant other, I'd suggest looking elsewhere." He punches the location of the workshop into his GPS and is about to place his hand on the emerald to warp them when he feels Sonic's fingers twine with his to stop him. Shadow gives him a questioning look from over his shoulder.

Sonic has a sheepish grin on his face, "Think we can take the long way back?"

"So, there *was* a reason why you were waiting for me," Shadow responds with a smirk.

Sonic laughs and swings his legs a little, "Caught me red handed."

"Alright then," Shadow complies as he rests his palms on the leather grips of the handlebars, "Hang on tight." Shadow gives him ample time to do so too. He even freezes into a shiver when he feels Sonic's hands slide up his chest tantalizingly slow.

"I'm ready," Sonic says cheekily like he isn't aware his actions aren't what's causing the hold up.

Shadow nods and lets the engine roar to life as they speed away.

They're surrounded by the canopy of the city lights again. They're stunning as ever. It's a feeling that will never stop feeling new. It also serves as a good distraction. A calm before the storm. Although with Sonic's arms around him, Shadow feels secure and grounded. It's the little light of hope in an otherwise miserable moment.

They take their time going through the city streets and stopping at the pier. He watches Sonic as he eats ice cream like he's a little kid again. And they share sweet, tender kisses under the moonlight. It's a distraction. A wonderful distraction Shadow wants to completely immerse himself in and never come out of.

But there's that pull that lures him out. He knows why Sonic really came to meet him.

"We should get going, shouldn't we?" Shadow asks against Sonic's hungry lips.

"Just a little longer," Sonic murmurs as he pulls Shadow in for another deep kiss.

"Sonic..." It's meant to be a mix between warning and exasperated, but the sharp inhale from Sonic makes it feel different. Perhaps a better choice of words were in order, but it has Shadow pinning Sonic against the metal barrier anyway and delving deeper into Sonic's eager mouth. Sonic's mouth tastes like cream and sugar and vanilla and...he can't get enough of it. He feels a little guilty indulging in it, but there's also that warm flavor that he knows is specifically *Sonic* and it drives him wild every time it hits his palette.

They stay like that longer than they should. Exchanging kisses, breaths, and warmth. Shadow is the one who has to finally pull away because he knows Sonic is stalling. Shadow appreciates it though. He doesn't want to do this as much as anyone else.

They do go back and Rouge is already there and looking impatient as ever. She gets up from the porch of the workshop and makes her way over to Shadow, "I thought you said you'd be here. I've been waiting for almost two hours."

"Lost track of time," is all Shadow says as he helps Sonic off the bike. He doesn't even look at Rouge when he walks past her.

She grabs him by the arm and carts him to the side anyway, "Really? Today of all days?"

Shadow gives her a hard look, “Don’t lecture me.”

She puts her hands on her hips and her mouth twists into a frown, “I wouldn’t have to if you weren’t acting so childish.”

Shadow folds his arms across his chest and narrows his eyes, “I’m not acting like a child.”

“Uh-huh. Always late. Always distracted. Unyielding when it comes to anything,” Rouge starts to point out.

He cuts her off, “If anyone is acting like a spoiled brat it’s you. I always make the tough decisions. I always have to have a plan. And I always have to decide what I feel is best. You tossed this onto me and excuse me for being a little unsure and scared about making this decision. If you don’t like it then make the decision your own damn self.”

“Guys,” Sonic’s voice pipes up, interrupting them. He has the bird in his hands so he must have gone inside already. He shifts his weight from one foot to the other before speaking again, “Tails is ready for you.”

Rouge sighs and begins to walk over to Sonic, but stops when she feels Shadow’s hand on her shoulder. She jerks away and is about to tell him off when she sees his face.

“I apologize. I’m on edge from... all of this,” Shadow explains with a frown, “You’re right, okay? I’ve been avoiding this and it’s something I need to take care of.”

Rouge looks like she feels guilty for fighting with him. She slings an arm around his shoulder and gives him a sad smile, “How can I stay mad at you? Besides, being angry at each other will just cause premature wrinkle lines for me.”

Shadow just rolls his eyes, but there’s a faint smile on his face.

Sonic starts to guide them in back, but Shadow stops him. Sonic just watches him a bit confused.

“Tell Tails... that I apologize for making him reconstruct Omega’s body,” Shadow says with a grim tone.

Sonic’s eyes widen at the implications of his words. He swallows lightly before whispering, “Shadow, you don’t have to do this.”

“I do, Sonic,” Shadow nods and he looks like he absolutely loathes himself for saying it.

Sonic looks down at the bird and creases his brow. He nods back before holding his hands out for Shadow and watching the bird carefully rest in Shadow’s palms. He takes a step back and gives the two some space.

Shadow holds his hands out to Rouge so she can say her good-byes. She’s gently petting it’s delicate head and going on about some memories they’ve had on missions. Mostly ending with Omega completely obliterating everything. Rouge does an impression of him saying, “Stealth missions are for the weak.”

They both laugh at it, but Shadow has to turn away so Sonic doesn’t see him when his face contorts into anguish. Rouge rubs his back and looks up and out at the horizon as her eyes glisten with tears.

“You’re doing the right thing, hon,” she whispers to him.

"I know," he grits out, "and I *hate* it."

"Here," she offers as she shifts her hand next to Shadow's so they're both holding it, "It'll be easier if we do it together."

Shadow just nods. He watches the bird flutter its wings and they lift their hands up together. He can feel the delicate legs rise and leave his palm. It floats on a current and drops once, but catches itself midway. It flies up into the sky until it's just a silhouette against the moon.

Shadow watches it until it vanishes. He closes his eyelids and feels that familiar pressure behind his eyes.

Loss. He wishes it would visit him less frequently.

"Shadow..." Rouge goes to touch his shoulder.

Shadow lifts his hand up to stop her and whispers, "Just give me time." He walks back to his bike and places his hand on the Chaos Emerald.

"Shadow!" Sonic cries out and goes to run to him, but Rouge stops him and shakes her head. Sonic looks up and sees Shadow locking eyes with him. Sonic feels his heart clench when he sees reflection of the moonlight against the glassiness of Shadow's eyes. A single tear slips down from his cheek before he looks away mournfully.

Sonic sees the flash of green and he pushes past Rouge. He skids to the spot just as the light dims out of existence and Sonic can see the imprint of the wheels still pressed into the grass. He hangs his head. He knew it. He was stalling because he knew this would happen. He knew the moment Tails was finished with Omega, Shadow would leave.

Sonic spins around and looks at Rouge, "Where is he?"

"Home," Rouge states with a shrug, "Probably."

"Tell me where that is," Sonic demands desperately.

"He needs his space, hon," she tries to reason.

"I need to know where he is," Sonic tries again.

Rouge frowns and shakes her head, "I can't tell you. It goes against GUN protocol..."

"Screw protocol!" Sonic shouts, "I need to comfort him!"

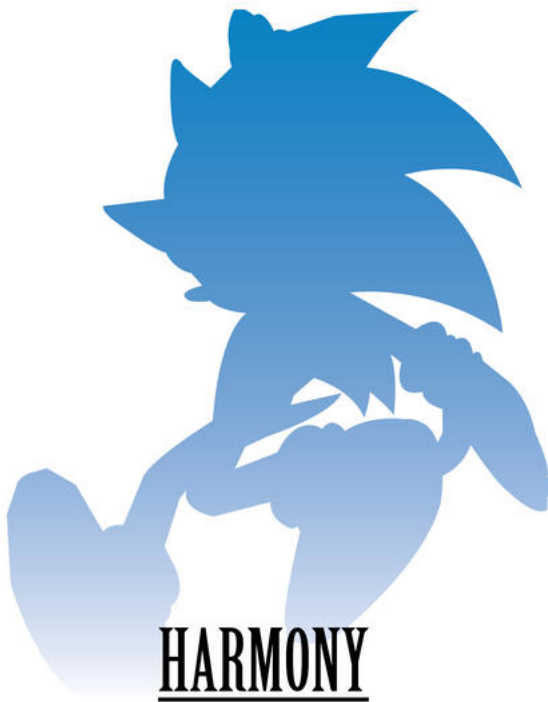
Rouge looks taken aback for a moment before placing her hands on her hips, "He gets like this. Don't worry too much about it, okay? He'll come back. He always does."

Sonic is silent for a long while before he resorts to laughing. His full smile doesn't reach his face, but it's a pretty good façade, "Yeah. Of course. What am I getting worked up about?" He rubs the back of his head sheepishly and taps his foot on the ground out of nervous habit. The silence between them is thick again before Sonic goes to wave her off with his signature smile in full bloom on his face, "Just tell him I say hey! I'll catch ya on the flip side!"

She gives him a concerned look as he goes to run back into the small workshop. She sees the light turn on in the small attic window. She notes Sonic's spiky silhouette sit still before bowing his head down and burying his face into his hands.

She sighs and slowly makes her way in the direction of the train station. It's been a long night.

Unveiled Truth



Chapter Nine: Unveiled Truth

Shadow takes his weekend to make his empty, sterile apartment look at least partially lived in. It serves as a good distraction. He treats it like any other mission. He hasn't really looked into his bank account for the two years he's worked for GUN, but he's surprised when he has more than enough for 'essentials.'

He has to admit that it is nice to have a place to actually hang up his photographs now besides a metal locker. Although, he wishes he had a picture of him, Rouge, and Omega together. Perhaps Rouge had one. He'd ask her on Monday. He also makes a mental note to himself to get a photo of him and Sonic soon.

Shadow clenches his chest.

Sonic.

He both wants him here and doesn't. He wants to have him here as a distraction, but he doesn't want him to see him like this. He doesn't want anyone to see him like this. He doesn't even want to see himself.

He's supposed to be strong. He's the Ultimate Life Form. He wasn't supposed to feel weakness.

He keeps thinking about how easily Sonic trusted him too. It's what he's wanted for awhile, but now it kind of terrifies him. What if he makes the wrong call and Sonic willfully follows him without questioning it?

Everything he thought he wanted is turned on its head now. Everything he's feeling is different. He thinks about Sonic sitting on his bike with his jacket and it makes him sick. At first, it felt exciting; but now all he feels is dread because he's scared he's rubbing off on him. He's petrified he's tainting all the good in him.

Sonic was the world to him. The Earth in the palms of his destructive hands. All it would take is one easy move.

Shadow feels his chest heave and he grabs his emerald off the counter immediately. He teleports to his bike and pulls open the trunk. He sees the gun tucked away inside. He grabs it and grips it hard in his hands. He glares down at it and thinks about every living life he's taken with it. He kept it as a reminder to never use it again, but now... He wants nothing to do with it. Now that he's with Sonic, he doesn't want to be the GUN agent to fire it. He doesn't want anyone using it. Ever. Again.

He wants to erase all the bad he's ever done, but no matter how much he tries to move on from it, it won't change the fact he's done it. He isn't that person anymore, but he can feel that presence somewhere still buried inside him. Itching to resurface again.

His palms heat up and he cries out as the gun melts away into its original elements and cools into a formless mass.

Then, one last thought hit his head. He had bigger concerns than guns. He was a living, breathing weapon.

Sonic, transversely, was the savior and the hope for the planet.

What the hell was he thinking when he pursued this?

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Rouge drags her feet over to her locker and groans. She pulls out her busted makeup kits and tries to make something work with it.

Shadow is already there. He's tinkering on the thrusters of his shoes with a small toolset. Some of the inner rings are rusted and he's sure he knows why. He's lucky he had brought extra for such occasions. Shadow glances up at Rouge for a moment before commenting, "Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed."

Rouge is applying her lipstick and giving Shadow a look, "Obviously. And you're one to talk."

Shadow just lowers his head and continues working on the inner compartments. He can feel the heaviness of his eyes from lack of sleep, but he just doesn't want to admit it.

Shadow's silence means Rouge both won and lost that argument. She hates when it happens too. She thinks about Sonic's strange behavior before addressing her partner, "Have you talked to Sonic since that one night?"

There's a small clang from where Shadow's dropped one of his pieces on the ground. He's staring into space and barely recognizes when Rouge tries to get his attention again. "Oh, uh... No," Shadow finally says before he leans down to grab the fallen piece.

"I think you should," she says with some concern, "He was acting... off."

"Weren't you the one who said he had tough skin?" Shadow asks gruffly.

“Yeah, but...” she starts to say.

“Then, he’s fine,” Shadow cuts her off and screws the pieces of his soles back together.

Rouge watches him put his shoes back on and hooks his inhibitors around to keep them secure. She sits down next to him on the bench and asks, “Are you avoiding him?”

Shadow get up and puts his toolkit back into the locker before closing it. He glances back at her from over his shoulder before sighing, “I think I jumped the gun.”

She raises an eyebrow at him, “On what?”

“On the two of us,” Shadow murmurs.

Rouge laughs a little, but stops when she realizes Shadow is serious, “I’ve seen you two together, Shadow. What you have is genuine.”

Shadow’s hand slides down the locker door and shakes his head, “I’m having second thoughts about this.”

“It’s okay, hon,” she says in a reassuring tone, “I think the best thing you can do right now is talk to *him* about it.”

Shadow mulls over it in his mind for a moment before slowly nodding, “Yeah, you’re right.”

She watches him leave without another word and shakes her head. She was hoping Shadow would get out of this rut on his own over the weekend, but it doesn’t seem like that was the case. She knows it’ll take time for him to get over everything, but she was hoping he’d be back to his normal gloomy self at least.

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Shadow keeps promising himself that he’ll visit Sonic throughout the week, but it never comes to fruition. There’s always an excuse he makes, but mostly he’s blaming it on the awful headaches he’s been having.

For one reason or another he’s become very sensitive to noise. It’s never been like this before. Never this bad either.

He finds himself sleeping on his couch when the weekend rolls back around and he’s startled awake by his doorbell. Mostly because he doesn’t expect company. The only other person he talks to is Rouge. No one else really knows he lives there.

Shadow makes his way to the door and holds his head when he hears the loud, frantic ringing. When he gets down there, he’s going to have a stern talking to with Rouge. Although, when he makes it down to the lobby floor and opens the door, he’s surprised to see Tails of all people.

“Hello?” He asks more than greets.

“Shadow! Thank goodness you’re home! Is Sonic here?” Tails asks quickly.

Shadow raises a brow at him, “No... Why would he be here?”

Tails’ expression drops when he hears that.

“How did you find me?” Shadow questions with irritation.

“Don’t get mad, Shadow. I... I hacked into the GUN database and...”

Shadow cuts him off with cool anger, “What?”

“No, listen. I can’t find Sonic anywhere! I’m worried! He and Knuckles got into this huge argument and, out of nowhere, Sonic announced that he wasn’t going to be part of the Freedom Fighters anymore,” Tails explains with tears threatening his eyes.

Shadow holds his head, feeling it throbbing in his skull. He grits his teeth and glares down at him, “Are you sure? Sonic would never...”

“I’m serious, Shadow,” Tails cries out, “He left. No one knows where he went!”

Shadow sighs and looks down at the fox boy. He hates how his eyes remind him of Maria’s. Begging him. “Alright,” Shadow finally says with a defeated tone, “I’ll try to find him.”

“I’ll come with you,” Tails exclaims.

“No,” Shadow shakes his head, “You’ll just slow me down.”

Tails frowns, but nods to him anyway, “Fine... but promise you’ll contact me if you have any leads.”

“You’ll be the first to know,” Shadow tells him, “You have my word.”

“Thank you!” Tails says gratefully. He turns to fly away, but stops to wave Shadow good-bye.

Shadow waves back, but tries to contain a snarl. Stupid genius kid. There goes his solitude. He wonders if it’s too late to find a new place to stay. Shadow shuts the door and makes his way back upstairs. He walks over to the counter and grabs his emerald. He considers the possible locations Sonic would be. He also thinks about how this is pointless and it’s probably just Sonic overreacting. There’s no way he’d actually quit the Freedom Fighters. He was *Sonic* after all. He started the damn thing.

He figures he’s not going to find him here so he starts his search. He checks the city and outskirts. Nothing. He tries the pier and is almost certain he’d be there, but he’s not. Wherever Sonic is he must not want anyone to know.

Shadow files through his mind for any clues when he remembers something.

“Emerald Coast is beautiful this time of year.”

Although, it’s nighttime. Would he actually be there this late at night? Shadow doesn’t think too much on it before teleporting there.

Shadow makes his way along the coast line until he spots a lone figure laying on a foldout chair. He can see the blue radiating against the moonlight and he knows instantly that it’s Sonic. He walks over to him and folds his arms across his chest, “A bit asinine to sunbathe at night, isn’t it?”

Sonic seems surprised to see him as he turns to wipe his eyes clear of tears before turning back to him. He lazes back into a comfortable position as he replies, “I’m starting a new trend. Moonbathing. It’s all the rage.”

“No wonder you’re so pale,” Shadow retorts a bit smugly.

Sonic just lets out a sheepish laugh and shrugs, “How did you find me?”

Shadow hums out like he's pretending to think, "Someone told me this was a good vacation spot."

Sonic groans as the memory floods back into his head, "Nothing gets past you."

"I'm a government agent," Shadow states as he stands next to the lounging hedgehog, "I'm trained to be observant."

Sonic nods to that, but doesn't look Shadow in the eye. It doesn't make a difference though. He can see the slight pink around his sclera.

"You came here to be alone," Shadow affirms softly.

"Yeah..." Sonic murmurs as he pulls his knees up to his chest.

Shadow makes a low noise like he understands. He turns to walk off, but stops when he feels Sonic's hand grabbing his. He glances at Sonic from over his shoulder.

"You're the only one I really wanna see right now," Sonic admits, "but I understand if you're busy. I know a lot has happened. I didn't wanna bother you."

That's surprisingly considerate for Sonic's standards. He's concerned about the implications of it though. He turns back to him and squeezes his hand in a reassuring way that tells him he's not leaving his side. "You should be with your friends," Shadow says.

Sonic says nothing.

Knowing that Sonic hadn't even informed Tails where he was sets off some red flags in his head now. "I don't... want to influence you or your decisions as a leader," Shadow finally says.

"Influence me?" Sonic asks with a short laugh, "What are you talking about, Shads?"

"You gave in so easily when it came to GUN taking that mech. I feel regretful for stirring up things on your end," Shadow states with a frown.

"Shadow, stop," Sonic sighs before kicking his legs over the side of the lounge chair and standing up at eyelevel with him, "I made that call. For me. If I felt any moral conflict with it, I would have spoke up about it. Tails didn't find anything that was disrupting Omega's body. Nothing. So, I doubt there would be any different outcome with that hunk of junk. Besides, I'd rather GUN have it instead of my bro. The last thing I need is Eggman busting into Tails' workshop while I'm not there."

Shadow isn't sure why he's stunned by that revelation, but he is. Sonic was actually quite articulate in his own way. "I see," Shadow murmurs quietly before speaking again, "A lot of concern for teammates you no longer work with."

Sonic stiffens before giving Shadow a sharp look, "Oh, you heard about that?"

"It's fine. I pass no judgments," Shadow says dismissively, "A lot of words can be said during a confrontation. Especially words you don't mean."

"I meant it, Shadow," Sonic responds almost immediately.

Shadow watches him with confusion. He says nothing, but waits for the other to clarify.

"I made the Freedom Fighters for *freedom*. That's all I want for everyone. I want everyone to live their lives the way they want to. I don't want to order and control anything," Sonic explains with a look of agitation, "Knuckles spends too much time with that stupid rock. The Master Emerald

controls the seven servers or whatever. That doesn't mean *I* can to control everyone. And if that's how he wants to run it, by all means." Sonic turns to Shadow and locks eyes with him, giving him a tired look, "The only goal I intended for this team is to fight for freedom... and I never felt more *trapped*."

Shadow can feel the pain in the other's eyes when he says that. Sonic goes to wrap his arms around Shadow, but Shadow instinctively flinches away. He holds Sonic's hand a bit tighter and looks down with a conflicting look, "I apologize."

Sonic's hand slips away and Shadow almost goes to reach for it again, but holds himself back. He looks out at the ocean and feels his heart swelling with anxiety.

"Is something wrong, Shadow?" Sonic asks a bit concerned himself.

"The device is under the pillow in the room I had occupied," Shadow informs.

Sonic glares and pouts at him, "Are you seriously doing this to me too?"

"I'm serious, Sonic. I'm a living weapon. You had every right to want to detain that," Shadow states, "I just don't want to hurt you."

"Me?" Sonic throws his head back and laughs like that's the funniest thing he's heard all day, "I'd like to see you try, Shadow."

Shadow reaches forward and grabs Sonic by the wrist roughly, "I'm being serious right now!"

Sonic locks eyes with him and his smile melts into a frown, "So am I." He pulls his hand out of Shadow's grip and folds his arms behind his head, "I'm not afraid of *you* hurting *me*. And now that I know you have good intentions, I have no need for that anymore."

Shadow can feel the anger rising in his chest and boiling into a snarl in his throat, "Sonic, you're important!"

"To the planet. Yeah, yeah. You told me," Sonic waves him off.

"No, to me! You're important to *me*! If anything were to happen to you because of me..." Shadow explains, feeling the memories flashing through his mind again. His mistakes. His errors. His losses. "I *can't* lose you," Shadow finishes a bit quieter.

Sonic can feel the heat rising to his face and his heart hammering in his chest. He swallows lightly as he tries to figure out what to say. He draws a few circles in the sand with his shoes before looking back over at Shadow, "You're really that scared you'll hurt me?"

"Petrified," Shadow states sternly with no hesitation.

Sonic sighs and looks like the weight of his body is too much to bare before walking back up to Shadow and holding his hand out, "Can I use your emerald?"

Shadow looks from Sonic's hand to his eyes before placing his emerald into Sonic's palm.

Sonic takes it and laces their fingers together. He teleports them out of the beach and into a heavily vegetated jungle area.

Shadow looks around, unsure of what he's looking at, "Where are we?"

"Mystic Ruins," Sonic states like he knows exactly where he is.

“Why?” Shadow asks a bit hesitantly.

“You’ll see,” Sonic says a bit smugly. He guides Shadow up the steps to a large ancient structure. There are serpent designs and statues decorating the outside. Sonic steps on a panel and it opens immediately like it was designed for him.

Shadow looks shocked by that, but continues to follow Sonic inside. They go down long corridors and pathways. Sonic guides them through a labyrinth, but Sonic seems to be very keen on where he is. Almost like he’s visited it many times in the past.

“Have you ever heard of Chaos?” Sonic asks as they continue to walk as if striking up a conversation will make the trip a bit more enjoyable.

Shadow racks his brain before nodding, “Yes, there was a prayer the Professor used to speak of. To initiate chaos. He created these creatures he called artificial chaos in order to study their properties. He taught me how to use Chaos Control with the emeralds by studying their behavior. I do not remember the prayer word-for-word, but—“

Sonic rolls his eyes and recites, “The servers are the seven Chaos. Chaos is power. Power enriched by the heart. The controller is the one that unifies the Chaos.”

Shadow looks surprised when he hears it, “I thought you told me you didn’t learn Chaos Control until you met me.”

Sonic snorts and laughs at him, “Knuckles says it so much it’ll never leave my head.”

“The echidna? What does he know? He can’t even use Chaos Control,” Shadow mocks gruffly.

Sonic’s face twists into a frown as he looks at Shadow, “You really are clueless about a lot of stuff, aren’t ya?”

“Excuse me?” Shadow asks like he’s offended.

“The echidna tribe protected the Chaos Emeralds for thousands of years,” Sonic explains lightly, “How Knuckles got here to this time period is beyond me, but I guess he’s been guarding the Master Emerald ever since.”

“Impossible,” Shadow shakes his head, “Your idiotic friend must be lying to you. Black Doom has had the Chaos Emeralds for thousands and thousands of years. He was using Chaos Control to break through planets’ atmospheres and sucking the nutrients from them. He came back 50 years later from making his rounds across the galaxy.”

“Well... That prayer is about how the Master Emerald controls the Chaos Emeralds. You know that, right?” Sonic informs him, “You must know. That’s how we...” Sonic stops and remembers. No, Shadow wouldn’t know that. He lost those memories some time ago.

“Wait, so...” Shadow ponders Sonic’s words, completely missing where he trailed off, “Are you telling me a group of dumb echidnas successfully stopped Black Doom’s armada for thousands of years?” Shadow chuckles under his breath and murmurs, “No wonder he had a hit list on the Earth.”

Sonic stops walking and looks down. He closes his eyes and hangs his head sadly.

Shadow senses that Sonic has stopped walking and turns to him. He sees the melancholy look on his face, “What?”

“Knuckles’ clan was completely wiped out by Chaos,” Sonic whispers.

Shadow squints at him like he’s not sure what he means.

“The echidna tribe could sense immense power. They must have sensed Black Doom’s first attack and countered it using the Master Emerald. They probably sought to use the power of the Chaos Emeralds to prevent another attack, but in doing so...” Sonic stops what he’s saying as they get to a large chamber. Sonic walks over to a mirror tucked away in the corner and angles it with the light of the torches. The light washes over a large mural.

Shadow takes it in with wide eyes. It’s a large water serpent and it’s destroying everything in its path. He’s seen something similar, but more tame. This must be the real Chaos. What the artificial ones were made from.

“That’s Perfect Chaos,” Sonic states with a grim look, “The god of destruction.”

Shadow turns to Sonic with a confused look before asking, “I don’t understand why you’re showing me this.”

Sonic sighs and looks like he’s already dreading what’s to come. He holds up two fingers before saying, “You have to promise me to: A. Not freak out and; B. Not tell anyone. Alright?”

“O...kay,” Shadow says slowly as he watches Sonic walk up the steps toward the painting.

Sonic turns slowly and looks down at Shadow, his emerald eyes practically glowing from the light reflecting off the mirrors. “You know how you’re the byproduct of an alien race hell bent on destroying the world?”

Shadow takes a step back and realizes what Sonic’s words mean. He looks up and he sees it. The blue coloration of the creatures skin and the brilliant emerald eyes. He looks away like he can’t believe it.

Sonic grumbles and marches back down the steps, “Dude, you said you weren’t going to...”

Shadow erupts into laughter and it’s deep and menacing and... a bit relieved.

Sonic looks like he has no idea what to make of it. Other than he thinks Shadow has completely lost it and finally gone insane. Sonic tries to grab Shadow by the shoulders and snap him out of it, “Earth to Shadow! Do you copy!?”

Shadow slowly regains his composure and just watches Sonic who has a cautious look on his face. He places a hand to his cheek and smirks, “So, there really is more to you than just looking like me.”

Sonic recognizes the callback and lets out a relieved laugh, “So, uh... we’re cool? This doesn’t change anything, right?”

Shadow raises a brow at him, “This changes *everything* now.”

Sonic looks horrified by that, “Whaddaya mean?”

“Sonic, do you realize what this means?” Shadow asks as he step-by-step walks up to the platform where the large mural sits, “The gravity of your world... The fabrication of your *life* is altered from this information. It all makes sense now.”

“Uh...” Sonic isn’t really following, “I kinda just told you this so you’d stop treating me like I was a

fragile chew toy.”

Shadow disregards Sonic’s comment and continues his thoughts out loud, “I thought you were the Ultimate Life Form. I thought there was a second prototype. I couldn’t wrap my mind around it, but...” He turns back to Sonic and holds his hand out to him. He watches Sonic make his way over to his side again. Shadow wraps an arm around Sonic’s shoulder and gestures up to the mural, “You’re god status, Sonic.”

The blue hero sighs and pulls away from Shadow’s arm, “No, I’m just Sonic the Hedgehog.”

Shadow watches him like he doesn’t understand.

“I’m already standing on a pedestal, Shadow. I don’t want all that. I just want to live my life the way *I* want to,” Sonic explains as he takes a seat on one of the steps, “Ya know, free? Sometimes all the attention gets exhausting. I don’t need *this* to make it worse.”

“Worse?” Shadow questions with an evil gleam to his eye, “No, this fixes everything, Sonic. We can figure out how to harness this. You could have infinite power. No foe would be able to stand up against you! No more threats on the Earth! The control of the world in your fingertips! No one would *dare* stand up to you!”

“Stop it!” Sonic spins around and glares at him, “No one person should have that much power, Shadow. I thought you already knew that.”

“It isn’t power just for power’s sake though! It’s protection! It’s the security of the planet!” Shadow retaliates.

“Yeah? Knuckles’ people said the same thing,” Sonic explains as he stands up, “And look what happened to them.” Sonic walks over to Shadow and places a hand to his cheek, speaking more gently, “Look what happened to you. Look how many people tried to manipulate you for your raw power.” Sonic smiles sadly when he sees Shadow’s face soften just from his touch. He goes on, “Think about how many lives were lost. The countless acts of violence. Hate, war, and betrayal. Greed is insatiable... and more power is only gunna fuel the fire.”

Shadow closes his eyes and takes in Sonic’s words. He hates how real they feel. All this time he mistook Sonic for being lazy, irresponsible, and ignorant; but the fact of the matter is that he’s more aware of this than anyone he’s ever met.

“Shadow... I know I play it off like things don’t get to me, but I’m tired of fighting,” Sonic admits with a frown, “Not in the whole stamina way, but mentally. It gets tiring. It’s the same thing over and over again. It’s become dull and routine. And yeah, I’ll probably show my face again when Egg-head reveal his ‘evil plot’ or whatever, but I’m done preparing for wars and fights. I’m only putting my friends in danger.”

“Big words for someone who hasn’t lost anyone,” Shadow says coldly.

Sonic’s eyes are big and glassy when he stares at Shadow. He opens his mouth, but then closes it and just shakes his head. “I cut it close a few times,” Sonic murmurs, “I guess, I’m just lucky.” He begins to walk back into the labyrinth before calling out to Shadow, “Come on. I wanna get outta here. This place is starting to make my skin crawl.”

Shadow glances back at the mural once more before nodding his head, “Alright.”

As they walk out of the stuffy ruins, Sonic stretches his arms out like he’s been feeling claustrophobic and cramped inside it.

“Can I take you home?” Shadow offers as he lifts his emerald up.

Sonic cringes like he really doesn’t want to. So, he spins around and jokes, “If that’s an offer to take me home with you, then I’m in.”

“With me, huh?” Shadow says like he’s considering it.

“Ya know, only if you’re up to it,” Sonic rambles a bit and rubs his arm nervously, “Like, it’s cool if you don’t wanna. But I could always try to make breakfast again in the morning or...”

Shadow lifts his hand up, signaling him to stop. “Please, don’t attempt to make breakfast in my apartment,” Shadow orders, “I doubt GUN will cover the expenses if you burn the building down.”

“Ouch, Shadow,” Sonic snickers as he fails to sound offended, “That was a low blow.”

Sonic studies Shadow’s unyielding face and he can’t tell what he’s thinking. He feels a little put on the spot, but his anxiety melts away when he sees the faint smile on Shadow’s face as he lifts his hand for Sonic to take. Sonic looks ecstatic as he reaches out and grabs it.

“One condition,” Shadow states a bit sternly.

“Okay,” Sonic shies away a little.

“You’re to contact your brother tomorrow. He’s the one who came looking for you,” Shadow demands with a straight face.

“I mean, I could totally call him right now—“

Shadow shakes his head and stops him, “Not tonight. Tomorrow.”

Sonic blinks like he doesn’t understand.

Shadow pulls Sonic in by the waist and murmurs in his ear with a dark chuckle, “Tonight is just for the two of us. I want to become one with the god of destruction.”

Sonic shudders against him and he can feel air catch in his throat. He just nods urgently and presses himself closer. The moment their lips touch, there’s a flash of light and they’re gone.

When they appear in the small apartment, Shadow guides him into the bedroom. He kisses Sonic furiously as each step he takes forward, he feels Sonic stumble backwards. Sonic’s legs catch onto the side of the bed and he lands softly onto the ebony sheets.

Sonic’s quills plume around him in their usual way like waves crashing onto the shore. His eyes are bright emeralds staring at him with lust. He’s such a colorful, light contrast to everything around him. Shadow wants him.

A small smirk appears on Sonic’s face and he beckons him with his finger.

Shadow nods, seeing no reason to resist. He crawls onto the mattress and lingers over the blue hedgehog. He lets out a pleased noise when he feels Sonic’s legs hook around his waist and pull him in closer. Shadow can see the blush that’s traveling up Sonic’s chest to his face and he murmurs, “You really want this, don’t you?”

“You’re the one who said they wanted to be one with me,” Sonic says with a weak laugh. It’s interrupted by a moan when he feels Shadow pressing forward against the backs of his legs. The action alone makes him feel empty and exposed. His whole demeanor completely changes and he

whispers, “Yeah. I want it, Shadow.”

Shadow’s lips curl into a snarl and spreads into a wicked smirk, “That’s what I thought you said.”

Shadow pushes inside that heat and feels his entire being ignite. He feels whole. Complete. Right where he needs to be. He blinks his eyes back into focus and looks down at Sonic who is staring up at him like he’s everything in the universe. His heart warms and expands in his chest, feeling just a bit too big for his ribcage.

His hips snap forward and he sees Sonic’s face contort into ecstasy. He loves the noises Sonic makes. He could get love drunk off them. It’s like he can control how loud he is just with the thrust of his hips and he loves having that power over him.

His fingers slide together with Sonic’s and he leans in to take Sonic’s mouth in his. Locking their lips together and exploring the slick moisture of it. A hungry growl reverberates from his throat and he lashes his tongue out. He feels Sonic gasp and whine against him and he keeps up a level rhythm.

Sonic pulls his mouth away long enough to demand, “More. Please, more.”

Shadow moans breathlessly and snaps his hips rougher, feeling the intense stretch around him. His fingers tighten in Sonic’s grip and he sucks in a sharp breath as he thinks about how deep he is. This is the closest he’s felt and he really does feel like one entity. His hips quicken on instinct, wanting to feel more.

Sonic lets out an unrestrained cry as the line between pain and pleasure blur together. All he wants is Shadow. All of him. He arches his back and meets his hips with Shadow’s. His impulse control has long left him. “Please, Shadow. Please,” Sonic begs like he wants more, but he’s not sure how.

Shadow’s hips stop briefly as he studies Sonic’s face. He nods once before pulling back a bit. He can feel Sonic writhe and whine from lack of contact, but he guides Sonic face down against the mattress. Shadow repositions himself over Sonic, his front meeting the other’s back and he murmurs to him, “Whatever you desire.”

Sonic chokes on a moan from both the words and Shadow pushing back into him. He buries his face into the sheets and cries out in pure pleasure as Shadow takes his hips in a firm grip and gives it to him from behind. Shadow’s hips slam into him over and over and over again. Sonic goes completely wild, moaning and seething and crying out in ecstasy.

“You’re so loud,” Shadow growls into his ear.

“Sorry...” Sonic whispers breathlessly, feeling his whole body shuddering uncontrollably, “I just... I can’t...”

“No,” Shadow murmurs with a dark chuckle, “I *love* it.”

Sonic cries out once more, louder than ever in response.

Shadow leans down and nips Sonic’s ear lightly as he feels his own impulse control fleeting him. He tries not to let his eyes roll back when his mind delves into the dark depths of his thoughts. The evil parts of him bubbling up and resurfacing, letting all of his pent up energy loose. It only gives him more delicious noises from Sonic. His muscles shake and his nerves buzz and he thrusts into him rougher and with purpose. He loves how Sonic writhes under him. He feels strong. Powerful. God-like even. No amount of chaos energy has made him feel this alive.

“Sh-Shadow... I... Please...” Sonic chokes out in a quaky voice.

“Give it to me,” Shadow demands with a snarl, “Give me your release!”

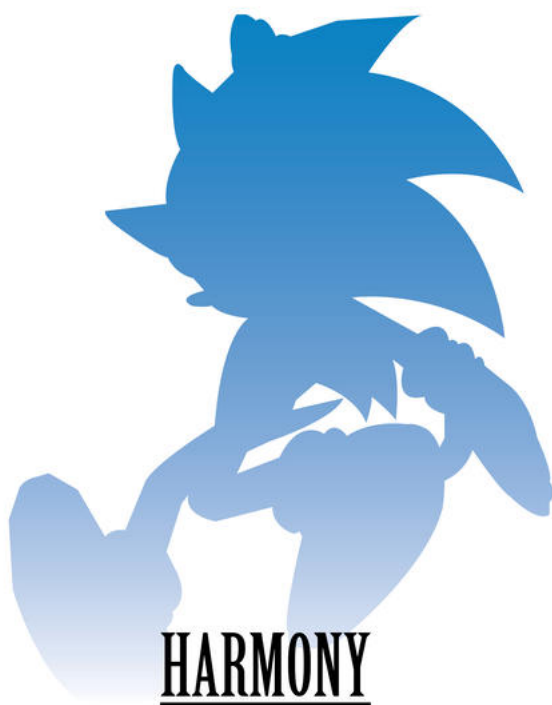
Sonic crumbles under him and let’s himself go, feeling an intense wash of freedom he’s only ever dreamt of. He muffles his cries into the mattress only to have Shadow grab him by the back of the head and lift it up again.

Shadow leans in, his panting hot and loud in Sonic’s ear. “Sonic,” he hisses as he hips seize. A desperate moan pours from his lips as he feels his hot release pulsating out from deep within him. He buries his face into the back of Sonic’s head, wanting to drown in an ocean of blue forever. As long as he’s one with Sonic.

They stay like that until it’s uncomfortable and even then they still remain like that. They know it’ll hurt later, but they can’t bear to be apart. This was harmony.

Perfect, complete harmony.

Memories



Chapter Ten: Memories

Sonic wakes up the next morning to the sun filtering through blinds. His eyes are barely open and he's trying to figure out which way is up. His body is both sated and in pain when he realizes where he fell asleep at.

Right. Shadow.

He turns and is expecting to see the gloomy hedgehog's scowling face, but what he gets is something he'd never expect. Shadow is laying asleep as his chest slowly rises and falls. His eyelids are closed lightly and his eyelashes rest lightly against his cheeks. He looks so at ease and peaceful.

Sonic tries not to make an audible aw at it as he leans in closer. He smiles and watches Shadow sleep. Something about this moment feels so rare and captivating. Usually, Shadow's face is tense and stoic, but this feels so different like he's seeing a different part of him. A more gentle side of him.

Shadow's eyelids flutter open and he almost has the same reaction as Sonic as to where and what had just transpired. When his eyes fall on the blue hedgehog though, he lets out a content sigh and pulls Sonic closer to him.

Sonic can't help it. He's stifling his laughter, but it's shaking at his shoulders.

Shadow lets out an irritated noise, "Stop. Let me enjoy this."

"I'm sorry. I just like how cuddly you are," Sonic snickers.

“If you like it, then you’ll stop laughing and enjoy it,” Shadow states angrily.

Sonic pouts a little, but lets a content smile spread across his face. He buries his face in Shadow’s chest against his white plume of fur.

They lay in silence for a long while and bask in the morning warmth. Sonic swears he can feel their hearts beating in unison. Like an aligned wavelength. Something feels different somehow. He just can’t put his finger on it.

“Sonic,” Shadow whispers leisurely.

Sonic lifts his head a little and locks eyes with Shadow. He can see the red hot passion in his eyes and his face heats up immediately. “Y-yeah...?” He stutters out nervously.

“I think...” Shadow continues quietly and places a finger to Sonic’s chin, angling their mouths close to one another, “I feel strange.”

Sonic laughs a little, “What do you mean?”

Shadow feels the warm breaths from Sonic’s laugh against his lips. He leans in and shares a brief kiss before continuing, “I don’t know? Like... I’m attached to you. Each time we get intimate I feel as if our bond is getting tighter. I have this intense... *feeling* toward you.”

Sonic swallows thickly as his brain processes Shadow’s words. He knows the answer, but he’s afraid to voice it. “Are you talking about...?” Sonic starts to say, but he stops when he sees how focused Shadow’s eyes are on him. His body was getting hot again. He wishes there was like a fan on or a window open or something. “Don’t think I’m weird if I ask this or anything, but uh... Are you trying to tell me you love me?”

“Love,” Shadow tests it on his tongue.

Sonic feels himself shudder just by watching Shadow’s lips wrap around the word.

Shadow takes his time pondering it over before nodding, “I believe that’s it.” His dark eyelids rests heavily on his eyes when he murmurs, “I love you.”

Nope. *Now* Sonic wishes there was a fan on because he can feel himself overheating. He’s reduced to a nervous mess. He can feel the sweat beading down his forehead.

“And you?” Shadow asks, his eyes still intense and focused, “Do you feel the same way?”

Sonic feels his heart beating so hard in his chest he feels as if he should be running. Like, far away from this. To the opposite end of the Earth. “I... I-I...” He doesn’t even know what to say. He wishes his mind wasn’t such a tsunami of thoughts. Why was he so freaked out by this? “I have to go to the bathroom!!!” Sonic shouts, tripping over the sheets and rushing out of the bedroom. He runs down the hall, but runs back down the other way when he realizes it’s not down there.

Shadow sits up and watches Sonic’s sporadic behavior with confusion.

Sonic goes straight for the sink when he enters the foreign bathroom. He turns the water on and splashes his face a few times just to cool himself off. He looks up at himself and sees how big and blown his pupils are. He has to look away because it scares him. He shakes his head. Why is he scared? Nothing changed between them, right? They’ve been doing this. It isn’t new.

Why is he feeling so claustrophobic and trapped by this? He must love Shadow back. There’s no

way he doesn't. He wouldn't have been okay with everything up until now.

Sonic hears the knock on the door and he jumps, knocking literally everything off the counter.

Shadow opens the door and sees the fallen toothbrush, soap, and the trays they were resting upon. He sighs and walks over and picks the items up. Well, he glances over his toothbrush and throws it out. Shadow looks over Sonic and raises an eyebrow, "Your face is all wet."

"I uh... yeah! I wash my face every morning," Sonic explains a bit too loudly, "Gotta keep those pores clean!"

Shadow snatches the rag that's hanging up over the toilet and shoves it in Sonic's face, "You're acting strange." Shadow stops and rethinks his statement, "Stranger than usual." Luckily, Shadow walks out a moment later leaving him be.

Sonic immediately deflates and slides down the counter, resting his head on the cabinets.

"Don't forget to call Tails," Shadow calls out from the other room.

Sonic leaps up in surprise when he hears his voice and stifles back a cry of agony when his head collides with the countertop. "Y-yeah," Sonic says back, eyes watering and voice higher pitched, "Will do, Shads!" Sonic waits for the pain on his head to subside before tapping on his cell. He watches it boot up with a bored look on his face as a million messages pop up. He goes straight for Tails' number and lets it ring, "H-hey, buddy..."

-

Shadow is sitting at the counter, tapping his finger on the marble top as he goes over what had just happened in his head. Things didn't really seem to add up. Perhaps he jumped the gun again. He wouldn't blame Sonic for having second thoughts. He'd be a hypocrite if he said didn't as well, but it was still mildly concerning. He isn't one to pry though. So, he decides to leave it be.

It takes Sonic a good while to get out of his bathroom and he's assuming he called Tails in that time. Just as he thinks that, the blue hedgehog appears in the kitchen phone still in hand.

Predictable.

"He's understandably worried," Shadow points out.

Sonic looks taken aback, but looks down at his phone sheepishly, "Yeah... I freaked him out. Brother of the year award."

"I can take you where you need to go if it's easier," Shadow informs him.

Sonic looks offended, "I'm not leaving yet. I mean, if you want me to I will, but I'm not the kinda guy who does it and leaves."

Shadow looks confused by his words.

Sonic rubs his arm nervously and feels like he needs to explain himself. He takes a seat next to Shadow and gets distracted by how the chair spins back and forth. He tries to stay serious though as he places his hand on Shadow's, "It's... cool. That you like me. Like that."

"You mean love," Shadow corrects him.

Sonic feels his face fume, "Yeah, *that*. Um..."

“And you don’t feel the same,” Shadow concludes with a nod, “It’s okay.”

Sonic buries his face in his arms and groans, “Shadow, don’t make this harder than it already is.”

“I apologize. I had the notion I was making things less complicated,” Shadow explains, sounding legitimately sorry for it.

That just makes Sonic feel worse. He peeks his head out from his arms and looks up at Shadow with a look of dread, “I... I...” Sonic’s eyes dart around before he sighs, “I think I might feel... *that*. For you. But it’s uh... I feel trapped somehow. By it.” Sonic winces like he doesn’t want to see the other’s reaction.

Shadow glances down with a look of intense focus as he goes over this in his head. He nods a few times as his mind goes through the possibilities, “You feel as though you’re relinquishing your freedom for this type of relationship.”

“Don’t say it like that, Shadow!!!” Sonic practically screeches.

Shadow is bewildered by Sonic’s response, “Is that not how you feel?”

“It... is,” Sonic says like it’s the hardest thing he’s ever had to admit, “but it makes me sound like a jerk!”

“I don’t see it that way,” Shadow replies with a blank look.

Sonic blinks at him a few times like he’s sure there’s a catch, but when Shadow doesn’t falter he’s sure of it. The guy was telling the truth. Sonic looks away with a frown and says, “I was afraid you’d think I wasn’t serious about this. About *Us*.”

“You aren’t serious about a lot of things,” Shadow comments with a smirk and he likes the way Sonic tenses up when he says it. He finishes his train of thought to ease him though, “but you wouldn’t have shared your origins with me if you weren’t.”

Sonic smiles lightly and takes Shadow’s hand in his, “Thanks... for understanding.”

“Of course,” Shadow nods to him, “You have a free spirit.”

Sonic’s eyes widen when he hears that.

“I like that about you,” Shadow finishes as he ruffles the top of Sonic’s head before getting up and stretching.

Sonic watches Shadow walk across the kitchen. He seems less tense and relaxed this morning and he tries not to think too much into it. Is this how he acts alone? Around Rouge? Anyone else? He isn’t sure, but it’s kind of comforting. Getting a compliment from Shadow without having to decode a second meaning was really, really nice.

Shadow shows Sonic step-by-step how to make pancakes. From how to funnel the dry ingredients and adding the wet ones in gradually to the mix to how high to have the stove. Sonic is impressed and asks how he knows how to cook so well and Shadow just gives him a solemn look as he explains how he’d take care of Maria on the days her symptoms worsened. Sonic feels bad for bringing it up, but Shadow just explains that he doesn’t mind as long as they’re good memories.

Sonic’s face heats up when he feels Shadow hand him the spatula and wrap his fingers around his. He points out the small bubbles in the cooking batter and tells him that’s how he knows when it’s

time to flip them. He helps Sonic carefully flip it and Sonic feels a surge of pride in his heart when he sees that he actually did it. He continues cooking them and flipping them under Shadow's watchful eye and he jumps for joy every time he does it right.

When they sit down to eat, Sonic points out the pictures on the wall. Shadow smiles softly at them as if recollecting a distant memory and tells Sonic he wants to take a picture with him so he can add it to the wall. Sonic just shrugs and suggests that they could swing by Twinkle Park because they have professional photographers that do that kind of thing, but then realizes way too late that in going there people would instantly put two and two together that they were dating. Shadow doesn't seem to mind. Sonic could tell his new objective was to get that picture and once Shadow has a mission set out in his mind he'll stop at nothing to achieve it. Sonic just laughs to himself at the thought of it.

Sonic uses Shadow's emerald to warp them there since he knows where it is specifically. When they get to the ticket booth and the worker tells them only couples get in for free. Shadow glares at them, takes Sonic's hand, and declares with a scowl that Sonic *is* his boyfriend. The worker's brain looks like it short circuited and Sonic has to cart Shadow away feeling completely flustered. Admittedly, it is kind of nice to walk around with his hand in Shadow's though.

They get to the place where they take photographs and Shadow is looking a bit unsure about it suddenly. He doesn't know how he feels about other people watching him and directing him on what to do. Sonic helps him ease up and relax and they get a few pretty good shots. One of them is a personal favorite for Sonic because it's of him leaning into Shadow and smiling because he can see the faint hint of a smile of Shadow's face. He orders an extra copy of that one for himself.

They have to wait an hour for them to process though and Sonic guides them out to a concession stand that sells cotton candy. Shadow pays for it even though he's bewildered about the fact that it completely melts in his mouth before he can even chew it. Sonic can't stop laughing at Shadow's reaction. It was priceless.

Sonic asks him why he likes pictures so much. Shadow explains that he finds them to be very crucial to him because it's physical evidence of events that have happened in his life. Losing a good portion of his memory has made him appreciate photos and how it can capture a specific moment in time. Like looking into the past.

Sonic isn't expecting such a deep analysis of it, but it does make him appreciate pictures a bit more because of it. He has no idea how much he'll remember in five years. Or even ten. A lot can happen and time can race past him in a whirlwind. He knows one thing though, he'll never forget Shadow. Ever.

They stand and place the framed photo on the wall together. Shadow admires it and wraps an arm around Sonic's shoulders and pulls him in. "You know... I think this one is my favorite," Shadow whispers.

Sonic feels himself blush and he smiles with him.

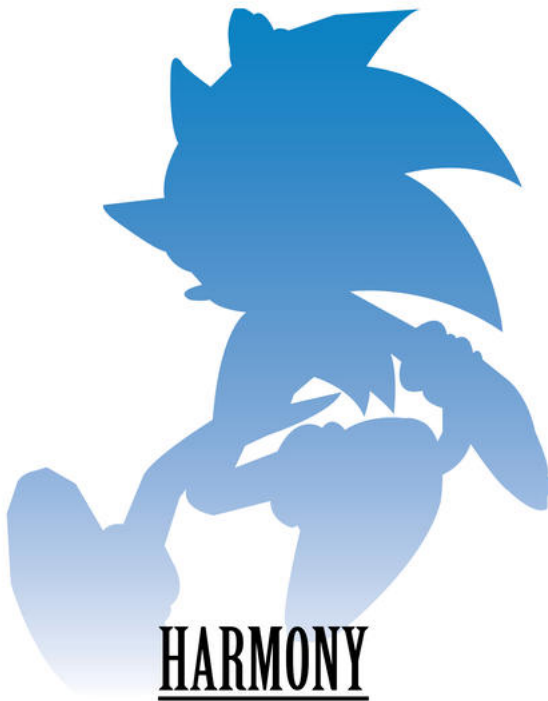
As the sun goes down, Shadow is finding that his headaches are getting much worse. Just before the two head to bed together, Shadow stumbles forward and is gripping his head tightly. Something is ringing in his ears and it feels like his brain is being prodded at. Sonic looks really concerned, but Shadow tries to wave it off. Blaming it on a sugar rush from having too many sweets today, but Shadow really doesn't know what it is. What he does know is that he doesn't want to see Sonic scared on his behalf. There's something almost torturous about it.

They head to bed and Shadow presses his forehead up to Sonic's soft chest, trying to focus on his heartbeat instead of the pain.

The Showdown

Chapter Summary

There's two more chapters after this. So, it's not over. Also, when it is over, I'll link the second part of this series (when I post it) to the last chapter. Thank you to those who have been reading so far. It means a lot.



Chapter Eleven: The Showdown

Shadow gets a rude awakening the morning after from the commander urgently advising him to come to base as soon as possible. He tells him that Doctor Robotnik has been sighted.

“I’ll be on my way,” Shadow informs him before pulling himself out of bed.

“Wait!” Sonic stops him by grabbing his hand tightly.

Shadow feels his body being pulled onto a different plane of reality. One where he’s floating against the dark canopy of space. He shakes his head and knocks himself out of whatever that was and looks back at Sonic with a confused look.

“I’ll go,” Sonic tells him.

“I have orders. I have to go,” Shadow states.

Sonic shakes his head, "Don't go. Please. I'll take care of it."

"Can't we not go together?" Shadow asks.

Sonic looks away with his brow creased, "I wanna go in your place."

Shadow shakes his head, "I can't do that." He pulls his hand away and makes his way into the kitchen, "And I don't have time to argue."

Sonic runs into the kitchen after him and gives him a determined look, "Fine, I'll go. With you and Rouge."

Shadow raises an eyebrow, "...As a GUN agent?"

Sonic nods quickly, "Yeah, I can't let you go alone."

Shadow thinks it over for a moment. They are down a member and Sonic would be a pretty good replacement. The commander might agree to it, even if it's last minute since it's Sonic the Hedgehog. Shadow sighs and wraps an arm around Sonic's waist, "Fine, but you'll be filing one hell of a report after this."

"Not sure what that means, but I'm sure Tails can hack into the system to get me out of it," Sonic snickers.

Shadow rolls his eyes and warps them to GUN's base.

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Rouge looks completely confused when she sees Shadow appear with Sonic in tow. Before she can even question it though, Shadow informs the commander of their situation. The commander allows Sonic to temporarily join their team and tries very hard to ignore Sonic's comment about his eyes and whether or not he can see different colors with each one.

The agents are gathered around the commander as he explains the situation. Sonic is the only one sitting down on a chair backwards and pillowing his face in his arms, trying to stay awake. It's a lot of words just to say Eggman has made a full frontal assault on the city with the remaining unaccounted for GUN robots and is taking refuge in his pyramid base. All teams are to assist in clearing a path for Team Dark. And when Sonic whispers whose team that is, Shadow shoots him a look.

Sonic snags one of the camo jackets and sports it for Shadow, but he mostly took it so he could put his phone and other belongings in the pockets. That, and free stuff. He's always down for free stuff.

Shadow hates how it matches Sonic's eyes and he ignores Rouge's elbow in his side when she sees his blush.

"What happened to your Chaos Emerald?" Shadow asks when he doesn't see it with the blue hero's belongings.

"Oh, uh... About that. I let my bro take it to power his plane," Sonic explains sheepishly, "Besides, how smart would it be if we charged straight into Eggman's base with all seven Chaos Emeralds together in one place?"

Shadow sighs and lets it slide because he has a point.

They set out on their mission shortly after. Sonic is surprised that Rouge can drive Shadow's motorcycle and the thing (without Shadow) rivals the speeds of Tails' Tornado 2. Shadow is running alongside the bike and Sonic is standing on the backend like he would with the wing of Tails' plane. The two hedgehogs split off to clear a roadblock or take down a rogue bot, but quickly regroup afterwards in their same positions.

"At this rate I won't be able to stretch my legs. You two aren't leaving any fun for me," Rouge complains as she revs the engine in annoyance.

"Just stay focused," Shadow orders.

"Yeah," Sonic chimes in with a laugh, "I'm sure Eggman has enough toys for all of us to break at his base."

Rouge looks over her shoulder at the blue hero standing just behind her, "My, my. Maybe you should tag along with us more often. I need some actual company once in awhile."

"Hmph," Shadow looks away like he didn't just hear that.

"Aw. Don't be like that," Sonic says playfully, "If you find the right things to talk about Shadow's more than enough company."

"I doubt Shadow is willing to exchange in pillow talk with the likes of me," Rouge snickers as she winks his way.

They both laugh at that.

The dark hero grits his teeth. Shadow misses Omega. So *badly* right now. He could do without the awkward commentary.

The sputtering of a propeller gets the three's attention as they see the blue plane hovering in the sky. Sonic's heart stops when he realizes it's Tails.

Knuckles sails down from the sky and lands on the other side of the bike, glaring at the blue hero. "Thought you called it quits," Knuckles says with irritation, "I see now that it was just to join another team."

Sonic rolls his eyes at him, "I didn't bail or anything. Being a leader was just smothering. At least the leader *you* wanted me to be. So, I handed you the baton. You're welcome." He crosses his arms across his chest and points at the blue plane, "But that's *my* bro and I want him off the battlefield."

"Oh, no you don't," Knuckles exclaims, "You wanted me to have the team? We do it my way."

Just then, two figures come fluttering down from the sky. It's Cream and she has Amy in tow. The pink hedgehog lets go and lands on the ground next to Shadow, running alongside him.

"Knuckles," Sonic says with warning.

"I had to make do. Our leader left, remember?" Knuckles explains heatedly, "Besides, they've been training."

"Can't you just let me take care of this?" Sonic says with a pout, "I'm more qualified."

Just as he says that, a robot comes into view. Shadow is about to charge at it, but pulls back when he sees Cream's chao begin to omit a yellow aura. It shoots out lightning paralyzing it and Amy rushes

in with a large pink, metallic hammer. She smashes through it with one blow as the team runs past it. She takes Cream's hand and flies her back to the others.

Shadow looks slightly impressed as he looks over the weapon, "Iron?"

Amy shakes her head as she holds it out to him, "Actually, it's titanium."

Shadow nods like he approves, "Sturdy, but lightweight."

She nods with a laugh, "Just until I can get more strength in my arms."

"Understandable," Shadow replies.

Sonic is giving the pink hedgehog a dirty look, "Mind if you don't hit on my boyfriend in front of me, Ames?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," she says back with a smirk, "Are you jealous?"

That strikes a nerve with the blue hero. He rests his hands on his hips and glares at her, "Me? Jealous of you? That's *really* funny."

"Then, why aren't you laughing?" Shadow asks with confusion.

"Whose side are you on, Shadow!?" Sonic cries out.

Amy rolls her eyes, "You can act like such a baby sometimes." She holds her hand up and calls out to Cream. The rabbit girl scoops her up and they head off down another pathway as she calls out to them, "We'll help your other troops clear the way!"

Sonic is glaring down at Shadow as his foot taps impatiently on the back end of the motorcycle.

Shadow has no literal idea what just happened or why Sonic is angry at him. He acts so weird around the pink one. "If you think I have feelings for her then you're daft," Shadow says with a sigh, "I already stated that I loved you."

Sonic jolts back and almost falls off the backend of the moving motorcycle, "D-d-d-don't say that out loud!!!"

Rouge is just looking at the two with her lips in a small 'o' shape. She doesn't say anything, but she's going to keep that information for another time. A time when she's alone with Shadow to tease him.

Shadow is getting irritated with everyone's reaction to that. He just rushes forward so he's leading the team. At least if he's in front he won't have to interact with anyone until they get to their destination.

Getting tired, Knuckles hops on the back of the bike and almost pushes Sonic off it.

Sonic glares at him, "I was here first."

"You can keep up. I can't," Knuckles indicates.

"Yeah well, you let my bro be a target in the sky. His plane has a Chaos Emerald in it," Sonic responds.

"Oh, I'm sorry. You don't get to make that call. He's carrying the Master Emerald. I'm going to

render the Chaos Emeralds useless before Eggman decides to even use them,” Knuckles retorts, “Besides, you ditched us for Shadow.”

“It isn’t like that, Knuckle-head,” Sonic states defensively.

“We probably could have figured everything out by now if you would have let us take that mech,” Knuckles points out.

“No, you wouldn’t,” Sonic says back. He feels Knuckles push him and he flips off the bike and onto his feet, running alongside it, “This has nothing to do with anything robotic. It’s something organic.”

Shadow picks that up and slows his speed a little. He glances at Sonic with a stunned look, “What do you mean?”

Knuckles places his hands on his hips and squints his eyes suspiciously, “Yeah, what *do* you mean?”

Sonic looks away and rushes forward. Shadow follows after him. Sonic clearly seems to be running from him, but he doesn’t let up.

When they’re a significant distance ahead of Rouge and Knuckles, Shadow asks again, “What did you mean by that?”

Sonic hates how Shadow can keep up with him sometimes. It’s difficult to run away when he wants to. He gives Shadow a sad look as he explains, “Tails... came to the conclusion after the chao kidnapping that Eggman could be harnessing some sort of mind control mechanism. And... He thinks you’re the target. He attacked GUN HQ and tried to get you to side with him by kidnapping Rouge. I’m just worried...”

“That’s why you didn’t want me to come,” Shadow concludes.

Sonic nods slowly.

“Listen to me,” Shadow says in a stern voice, “I was able to overcome Black Doom’s mind control attempt instantly. With you by my side, there’s no way it’ll happen a second time.”

“What do you mean?” Sonic questions.

“You’ve... helped me. I noticed how much more controlled my Chaos Blast is when I’m connected with you. I don’t know how or why, but it’s like your energy cools down the fury within me,” Shadow explains softly.

Sonic doesn’t look too sure.

“Sonic, if I’m the target, then I *need* to go,” Shadow holds his hand out to Sonic and finishes, “What happened to that optimistic flare of yours? You’re always ready for a fight. Especially one with the doctor.”

Sonic looks down at Shadow’s hand and hesitantly goes to touch it. He gives Shadow a sad look before saying, “I just don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t,” Shadow holds his hand tightly and murmurs, “You can do this.”

Sonic feels a smile spreading across his face without him even noticing. Shadow’s support means the world to him. He gives Shadow a confident grin and looks ahead, “Yeah, you’re right. I’m Sonic the Hedgehog. I cook goons like Eggman for breakfast.”

Shadow shakes his head and finds himself smiling despite himself.

-

The pyramid rises up from the horizon as they get closer. Once there, Rouge and Knuckles split up to search for the keys and an entrance as Sonic and Shadow stay behind to guard the Master Emerald with Tails.

“I don’t know what you were worried about, Sonic. I’m an expert pilot now,” Tails explains as he unhooks the Chaos Emerald from his plane and hands it to the blue hero, “I know I’ve crashed a few times in the beginning, but you have to learn to crawl before you can walk.”

Sonic nods and accepts the emerald gladly, “Yeah, I know. You’ve grown up a lot in these past years. I guess I just can’t get it out of my mind that you’re my lil bro.”

Tails just laughs, “I’ll always be your little brother.” He holds his fist out for Sonic and they both gleam with excitement as they fistbump.

Shadow is just watching the scene and how disgustingly sweet it is. It is adorable though. He’ll admit that at least.

Shadow lifts the communication device up to his mouth and speaks into it, “Status report, Rouge.”

Her voice comes to life in his ear, “Looking good so far. I found two. One more to go. Knuckles is being... quite incompetent.”

“I heard that!!!” Knuckles’ shout can be heard a ways off, “And I found one, but you stole it from me!”

Shadow makes a displeased noise, “Then, make the echidna work harder.”

Sonic’s head perks up when he hears that and snickers. He takes Shadow’s hand and lifts the device up to his mouth, “All you gotta do is butter him up. Tell him he’s the greatest treasure hunter in the world. He eats that stuff right up.”

“Tell your boyfriend I will,” she says to Shadow and the transmission cuts off.

Shadow just sighs. This was taking way longer than he’d like it to. It doesn’t help that the static from his earpiece is hurting his head. He pulls it off and hands it to Sonic, “Take this for a bit.”

“Oh... okay?” Sonic says as he hooks it up to his ear. He watches Shadow walk over to his bike and lean against it. “Everything alright?” Sonic asks with concern.

“Yeah, just a slight headache,” Shadow tells him as he rubs at his temples.

“How long have you been having them?” Sonic asks as he walks over to him.

Shadow just shrugs, “Just give me a minute.” He hates to think it, but even Sonic’s voice was intensifying the pain.

Sonic thinks he gets the hint and backs off a little.

Shadow closes his eyes and feels his body floating a little. Stars speckle into his vision and he’s at the ARK again. It’s different though. He’s outside, floating in space and gazing at the outside. He turns and Sonic is next to him smiling. It feels nice until there’s a loud, piercing noise. The ARK starts shaking as metal pieces start falling away from it. That’s when he realizes it’s falling toward them.

Shadow looks down at himself and then back at Sonic and they're both in their super forms. Sonic holds his hands up like he can't take the pressure anymore. He falls back against the soft glow of the planet.

Shadow jerks forward and grabs Sonic's wrist tightly. Everything is back to normal though and they're still standing outside Eggman's base.

Sonic looks down at Shadow's hand on him and he hunches over so they're eyelevel, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah..." Shadow's hand slips away from his and he's staring at the ground like he's confused by what he just saw.

Sonic doesn't seem convinced, but he doesn't have time to really argue because he can hear Rouge in his ear saying that they're in the clear. He places a finger to Shadow's chin and guides his face back up so he can look into his eyes. He can see Shadow's pupils blowing and dilating. He exchanges a look with Tails. "Um... They're ready for us, but I think you should stay here," Sonic says carefully.

Shadow shakes his head, "No, I'm fine." He stands back up and walks past him to the entrance. He guides the two inside where Knuckles and Rouge are standing in the large room with the keys already inside the door. "Open it up," Shadow orders them.

Rouge nods, but Knuckles gives him a gruff look before helping. They pry the door open and, just as expected, are met with a ton of security bots. Rouge and Knuckles tear through them and Shadow darts through, taking on more up ahead.

For once, Sonic is sticking behind with Tails who is carrying the large Master Emerald. Sonic escorts Tails through and takes on robots that were left behind. There's one thing he doesn't like about this strategy and that's how Shadow is in lead and far from him.

He's reminded of that gripping fear when Shadow was face-to-face with Black Doom. He had that heroic urge to reach out and take the emeralds so he could take him down himself, but was paralyzed by the toxic gases that ran through the comet. This time is different. This time he almost feels like he's paralyzed by fear.

"Everything will be alright," Tails reassures him with a smile, "We have the Master Emerald this time."

When Sonic hears Tails's voice, he feels some of that tension leave him and he gives him a broad smile, "Yeah! We got this!"

He hopes.

As they get further and further into the core of the base, boosting through trap doors and secret tunnels, the enemies get more and more frequent. So much so that Knuckles has to fall back with his emerald and Sonic joins Shadow and Rouge in fighting. Which he's more fond of.

Although, something is off about Shadow. He can tell. He's forgetting small things here and there. It doesn't initially scare him until Shadow has to be reminded of what their objective is. That's when even Rouge seems worried.

"Maybe you should take a breather," Rouge tells him as she places a hand on his shoulder.

"No, we're almost there. I don't want to waste anymore time," Shadow replies with a grim tone as he

smacks her hand away.

“Rouge is right. If you want, we can split up and I’ll head in first...” Sonic starts to say.

Shadow closes his eyes and shakes his head, “Not a chance, faker.”

Sonic feels his stomach drop. He hasn’t called him that in years. More specifically since he first met him. There’s no way he remembers that though, right? Those memories were detached from him.

“Rouge...” Sonic whispers and grabs her hand.

She looks back at him like she’s having the same thoughts, “I’ll keep an eye on him.”

Sonic is having major doubts now. Maybe he should have listened to Knuckles. Maybe he should have never deactivated that device. He shakes his head. No, he couldn’t think like that. He needed to trust Shadow. Trust that he’ll do the right thing in the end. He always does.

Shadow makes his way down the passageways and the walls are flickering in and out of existence. The torches form shadows on the walls and they’re all ghosts of his past: Black Doom, his army, the ARK, Maria, and the Professor. Once he reaches the final door, he’s taken back at the mechanical elements of it. Everything else was made of stone a moment ago. He looks around him and he swore he was traveling somewhere... with someone. Who were they?

He walks up to the door and it opens automatically for him and he’s standing in the room where the Eclipse Cannon is. Oh right. He was on the ARK. He must have forgotten.

He cringes and feels an ear piercing noise and it feels like his memories are getting ripped out of his skull. He lets out a painful wail before his body gives in and falls to the ground with a metallic clang.

“Shadow!!!”

Rouge is looking him over and checking for his pulse. She lets out a sigh of relief when she feels it, “He’s just unconscious.”

“What do you mean ‘just unconscious?’ He fell to the ground without warning,” Sonic exclaims fretfully. Sonic looks up and sees the worried looks of his companions and takes a deep breath. Right. If he freaks out everyone else will too. Sonic stands up tall again and forces a smile on his face, “I mean, he’ll be fine. He’s Shadow after all.”

The others nod and seem a little less tense than before. Rouge picks Shadow up from the ground and they walk into the final door. She stays behind with Knuckles as Tails follows Sonic who looks like he’s striding with purpose.

Sonic makes his way into the middle of the room and calls out, “I know you’re in here, Eggman! Now, come out so you can get your butt whooped!”

A metal platform descends from the ceiling and Eggman is standing upon it looking pleased with himself. “Ah, Sonic. Good of you to come. You’re just the blue pest I’ve been dying to see,” Eggman announces.

Torches light up one-by-one almost like they were automated and a cell appears where Amy and Cream are tied up in. Another larger machine in the middle appears with a glass container containing Omega’s bird and Chocola. There’s also a mechanism attached to it that looks almost identical to the Eclipse Canon power source.

Sonic grits his teeth and shouts, “Oh, you’ll be *seeing* some *dying* alright, Egg-brain!”

Eggman smiles like he’s pleasantly surprised to hear Sonic’s words, “That’s pretty dark for you, old adversary. It suites you.”

“Let my friends go,” Sonic demands with anger.

“What?” Eggman says like he’s disappointed, “Not going to share some of your stale puns with me? Have you run all out of jokes?”

“The only joke I see is *you*,” Sonic grits out.

“Sonic...” Tails says cautiously as he takes a step back and points at the chao in the container, “Look.”

Sonic looks up and watches carefully. Cream’s chao is slowly turning from its normal chocolate color to completely black. The back of its head flares out into upward spikes and red streaks gash through the black, almost identical to Shadow’s.

“Oh, this?” Eggman says gleefully as he motions to it, “Wasn’t it obvious? When I first built Omega, I had Shadow’s DNA at my disposal. So, I spliced it with this bird. Omega is one of my greatest creations, but I had to imprison him because he just wouldn’t listen. Stubborn just like a certain black hedgehog we all know.” He folds his arms across his chest and continues, “As for the little chao, that was all your doing. It must have bonded with Shadow at one point. You know how those creatures are. Like sponges. I was pleasantly surprised to pick up its signature.” Eggman announces with excitement. “With those two energy sources, I was able to control whatever they were hooked up to.”

“Why would you go through all the trouble to do that?” Sonic asks, like it doesn’t add up.

“I was testing *this*,” Eggman goes on as he lifts his hand to reveal a small green gem. One Sonic recognizes. It was on a star plate around Black Doom’s neck.

Sonic swallows and shakes his head like he can’t believe it.

“Oh, are you surprised? Sorry. I just couldn’t let it go to waste. It would solve my problem with both Shadow and Omega. Both my creation and my grandfather’s creation back in *my* control,” Eggman explains with a sly look.

“Why...? Why do you need to control Shadow?” Sonic says like he’s almost afraid to ask.

“Well... Isn’t that part even more obvious?” Eggman says with a smirk, “Shadow was one thing that’s ever come close to beating you. My plans actually went through for once and if it weren’t for that pesky system override, the world would have been mine.”

“No...” Sonic whispers.

Eggman snickers, “Dread looks good on you. Tell you what, I’m a generous guy. Hand over the last two emeralds and I’ll let your little friends go.”

Sonic looks out at his friends and frowns. He makes eye contact with Rouge and holds his hand up, “Let me have Shadow’s emerald.”

“Sonic...” she says a bit disgusted.

"I won't hurt him," Sonic replies with a defeated look.

"That isn't what I'm worried about," she tells him.

"I can't let you guys get hurt. I can't let anyone else get hurt because of me. If I'm what he wants..." Sonic starts to say.

"No!" Knuckles shouts as he makes his way over to Sonic's side. He glares up at the doctor and shouts, "If you want Sonic, you're going to have to go through all of us!!!"

"I'm not going to be doing anything," Eggman states with a cackle, "but you've chosen your own fates." His fingers type on a small keyboard as he sings out, "M-A-R-I-A." A large screen comes to life behind him and all of Shadow's files come up. The ones that are the most concerning are the ones filed away as Shadow's extracted memories. Eggman tampered with Shadow's memories before putting him into stasis so he could use them at a later date. The doctor places the small gem into a compartment and presses the button to download.

Shadow's eyes immediately open and he writhes in pain in Rouge's arms. Rouge holds him tight against her chest and tries to sooth him. He stops moving, his muscles twitching slightly before his eyes open once more a bit groggy, "Where am I?"

"You're in the doctor's base. He's trying to..." Rouge starts to say, but gasps when she sees him pull himself away from her.

"You're that government agent," Shadow snarls with hatred.

Rouge blinks at him and slowly stands up, "We're both government agents, Shadow. You're the leader of the Alpha team."

Shadow sneers, "I'd never work for the people who killed the Professor. The people who killed *Maria*. That must be some sort of sick joke."

"She's telling the truth," Sonic shouts to him, "We were working together to take down Eggman!"

Shadow glances down at Sonic's jacket and sees the logo. He grits his teeth and takes a step toward him, "You're that imposter. So, you're working for them too?" He grabs Sonic by the collar and looks deep into his eyes with a look of pure loathing, "Why would I take down the doctor? He freed me from scum like you."

Sonic can feel his heart shrivel up and die. Shadow doesn't remember him. Every moment they spent together, getting closer, all of it was gone. In a blink of an eye. Sonic can't even bring himself to utter a word to him. A single tear slips down his cheek.

Shadow sees it and shakes his head, "Pathetic." He throws Sonic to the ground and watches him skid across the floor, "You are just a regular hedgehog after all."

Eggman looks so pleased with himself as he orders, "Shadow, bring me the last two Chaos Emeralds and our plan shall commence."

"Right away," Shadow nods to him and looks down at his hand. There was one. Now, where was the other?

Sonic looks down at the ground as he tries to comprehend what just happened. He knew this was bad, but it was worse than he imagined.

Rouge flies over to Shadow and drills down with her foot first, but there's a flash of green light and her leg is caught in Shadow's grip. He tosses her while she's still spinning and she bounces across the ground several times.

Knuckles growls and slams his fists together before charging at Shadow. Shadow gives him a dull look and doesn't even need to use his Chaos Control to grab his arm and toss him over his shoulder. Before Knuckles can land, he spin kicks him into the wall.

Shadow glances around the room and zeroes in on Sonic.

"Sonic!" Tails shouts to him, "You have to get up and fight!"

Sonic pulls himself up and glares up at Eggman. He'll fight, but he won't fight Shadow. He pulls out his emerald and teleports up to the metal platform, but the moment he does it shocks him and he goes down.

"I see you noticed the electrical shield that's surrounding me and my equipment," Eggman says with giddy excitement, "I couldn't have you ruining my plans so easily."

Sonic pulls himself off the ground once more and glares up at him, "You're toast once this is all said and done."

"Says the hedgehog that got scorched like a mosquito to a bug zapper," Eggman taunts with a laugh.

Sonic feels the anger eating at his chest. He might just kill Eggman this time. Before he can continue that thought, he feels Shadow's hand grabbing his arm. Sonic warps away from him before he can take the emerald.

"You *can* use Chaos Control," Shadow states like he's surprised, "At first I thought that was a trick of the light."

"Of course I can use Chaos Control. You already know that," Sonic tries to explain to him, "We're friends. We're..." Sonic is having trouble saying it. So, instead he ruffles through his pocket and pulls out the picture of him and Shadow. He holds it out to him. "This is *us*," Sonic explains, "You... You told me that photographs are important because it captures a specific moment in time. And... that it's physical evidence of events that happened in your life."

Shadow studies Sonic's face for a moment, highly suspicious before slowly walking toward him. He gently takes the photo and looks it over. Shadow looks like he's desperately trying to remember it.

"Shadow! Don't trust him! He's trying to trick you," Eggman shouts down to him.

Shadow closes his eyes and his face contorts to anger. When his eyelids open again, he's glaring at Sonic with infernos burning in his fiery irises. Shadow tears the picture into pieces and throws it into Sonic's face. "You pathetic creatures will do anything to get what you want," Shadow seethes through clenched teeth.

Sonic watches as the pieces rain down around him and he tries to catch them in his hands. He doesn't get the chance because Shadow kicks him roughly in the gut and he goes down hard. Sonic can see the looming shadow casting over him and he knows Shadow is walking toward him. He clutches his fist, not wanting to fight.

"Stop!" Tails shouts as he rushes in front of Sonic, "Don't hurt him, Shadow!"

Shadow stops for a moment and looks him over.

“Tails, don’t...” Sonic chokes out, still trying to catch his breath from the last attack.

Shadow gazes at Sonic for a brief moment before a wicked smirk spreads across his face. “Irony how fate places things in the palm of your hand,” Shadow says darkly as he walks up to the fox boy. His hand snaps up and his fingers dig into Tails’ neck, holding him up above the ground, “It’s almost like what goes around comes around.”

Sonic has a look of sheer horror on his face when he sees Tails choking and gasping for air, “Shadow, don’t--!”

“The emerald,” Shadow demands as he holds his hand out, “Give it to me!”

Sonic doesn’t even think twice. He shoves the gem into Shadow’s hand and Tails is tossed at him. He grabs the fox boy and holds him in a tight embrace, feeling the fear and anger gripping his heart like a vice. “Are you okay, buddy?” Sonic says softly with tears in his eyes.

“Yeah,” Tails rasps out with a sad smile, “Sorry I got in the way.”

Sonic just shakes his head and pulls him close to his chest.

“This is it,” Shadow announces as he walks over to the other emeralds, “When all seven emeralds are gathered together...” He slowly places them into position and watches the radiant glow.

“Good, good,” Eggman nods to the dark hedgehog, “but one last thing must be done. You must kill the blue hedgehog.”

“What purpose would that serve?” Shadow asks with a laugh, “Look at him. He’s weak. Your wish is to control the world. With the Eclipse Canon...”

“Yeah, well, plans have changed,” Eggman states with a scowl, “Don’t question it. Just do it!”

Shadow glances at Sonic who is still sitting with Tails in his arms. He doesn’t understand what this has to do with the objective. He’s only fought with the blue hedgehog when he had gotten in the way. Other than that, he didn’t see the point in wasting his time.

Something clicks in Sonic’s mind. This wasn’t the Shadow he knew currently. This was the one he met three years prior. He couldn’t try to communicate with him as if he was the Shadow who had grown and learn from their past experiences. He’s still searching for his past and the answers. He had to remind him of who he was.

Everyone’s heads snap up when they see the faint glowing from the Master Emerald. Knuckles starts to chant Tikal’s prayer.

Shadow glares at the echidna and runs full speed at him. He grabs Knuckles by his head and smashes his face into the Master Emerald, shattering it to pieces. He tosses Knuckles to the ground like he’s a discarded piece of trash.

“Knuckles!!!” Rouge cries out as she runs over to him. She looks him over and sees that he’s out cold as stands before her former team mate. “I swore I’d stand by you no matter what, Shadow; but I can’t let you continue to do this!”

“Cute,” Shadow comments in a condescending manner, “What authority do you have over me exactly? I’d like to see you try and stop me.”

Rouge glares back at him, clearly ready to fight.

Sonic watches the interaction and remembers Shadow's words about Rouge being what Tails was to him. He knows Rouge is livid about Knuckles and he's really torn up about it too, but he can't let anyone else get hurt. Sonic gets to his feet with determination in his eyes.

"Sonic?" Tails questions.

"I need to try and stop him," Sonic tells him, "Think you can look after Knuckles?"

Tails nods.

"Thanks, buddy," Sonic says with a smile as he ruffles Tails' hair. Sonic dashes over to the unattended emeralds. He puts on a grin and pretends to poke the gems, "Hey, Shadow! I'm gunna touch them!" He makes noises as his finger goes back and forth, like he's messing with him.

"Shadow! Don't let him get near the core!" Eggman yells nervously.

Shadow's focus is off Rouge as he turns to the blue hedgehog with a scowl, "Don't touch it!"

"Make me," Sonic retorts snottily.

Shadow speed dashes at Sonic and tackles him. They both are launched into the core and the emeralds scatter across the ground. Shadow notices how easily the object falls apart and he looks around like he's confused as to where he is.

"Too slow!" Sonic shouts as he braces his feet on Shadow's torso and kicks him back. It isn't intended to hurt him and is about as light as when they were play fighting near Tails' workshop.

Shadow skids back and gazes at the stone ground like he doesn't know what's going on. He looks up at Eggman with a confused look, "Where are we? I thought we were on the ARK."

"Just kill that hedgehog!!!" Eggman shouts with anger as he smashes his fists on the control panel.

Shadow looks around like he's trying to get his bearings when Sonic tackles him to the ground. Shadow goes to punch him in the face when Sonic leans down and kisses him on the cheek. Shadow's heart leaps in his throat and he kicks the hero off him. He places his hand over his cheek as if it were a burn mark.

"You're it!" Sonic shouts over to him and dashes around back and forth, taunting him.

"Tag? Really?" Shadow sneers, "Aren't you a bit old to be playing games like this?" Shadow halts like something connects in his head. He looks up at Sonic like he's having a vague epiphany.

"Who... *are* you?" Shadow asks slowly.

"Just a guy who loves an adventure," Sonic states boldly, "I'm Sonic the Hedgehog."

Shadow snickers and shakes his head, "Well, your adventuring days are..." Shadow stops once more and makes eye contact with him. He sees the emerald in his eyes and they look familiar somehow.

"Are they coming to an end, Shads?" Sonic asks cheekily with his hands on his hips.

Shadow looks thoroughly freaked out as he takes a step back.

"Alright, cool. Now, that I got your attention," Sonic says as his trademark smile drops from his face, "I need to be real with you."

“What are you doing, Shadow! Finish him!” Eggman orders angrily.

Shadow looks up at Eggman and then back down at Sonic. He gets into a stance as his hands crackle with lightning.

Sonic holds his hands out to him, making himself as nonthreatening as possible as he slowly makes his way over to the disoriented hedgehog. Sonic lowers his voice so only he and Shadow can hear, “You told me you loved me and I wasn’t ready to hear it. I didn’t understand what was going through my head at the time, but I get it now. Everything is a balance of control and chaos. When there’s too much order in your life you end up not living it. When you have too much freedom you end up not committing to anything. You told me I was afraid to relinquish some of my freedom to you and you were right, but I’m not afraid anymore. You’re the perfect balance in my life.”

Shadow gives the other a suspicious look, “What exactly are you trying to say?”

“That I’m reciprocating your love,” Sonic states with certainty, “I love you too, Shadow.”

Shadow looks conflicted like he doesn’t understand what’s being said to him. This place wasn’t the ARK. He knows the ARK. He remember his feet against the metallic ground. The core fell apart almost as if it were made of cardboard. How much of this was real?

“I don’t like being toyed with,” Shadow seethes with anger.

“Eggman is messing with you. He’s a Robotnik, but not like Gerald. And definitely not like Maria. He’s a madman who wants to take over the world,” Sonic informs him with a stern tone, “You loved Maria like a sister. She was sick and frail. You took care of her when her symptoms got worse. You made her breakfast on those hard mornings, didn’t you?”

Shadow swallows thickly and the energy in his hand fades away, “How do you know that?”

“You told me,” Sonic confirms as he holds his hand out to him, “Your mind is being tampered with. You think you’re on the ARK three years ago, but you’re not. You lived those three years going on adventures, uncovering your past, and helping me. A lot has changed.”

Shadow takes another step back, “No, you’re lying. You’re lying to me. You’re trying to manipulate me. You’re fake. Just like everything else. There’s no way you can be real. I’m the only one who can use Chaos Control. I’m the Ultimate Life Form.”

“I’m not lying to you. Besides my own bro, I’ve never been more honest with anyone before,” Sonic explains slowly, “All this hate? You need to let it go.”

“They imprisoned me!” Shadow shouts, “GUN kept me captive! And now you’re working for them!”

“We’re working for them,” Sonic states, “Or more specifically, you are. I’m kinda only a stand in. You’re the actual leader.”

“I’ve had enough of this,” Shadow flexes his fingers once more as yellow energy surges through his palm, “If I must destroy everything in order to find the truth... *I will!*” He grabs Sonic extended hand with his and the electrical energy surges through Sonic’s body, rendering him paralyzed. Shadow spins Sonic around roughly and lets go, watching as he flies into the wall next to the two imprisoned girls.

Sonic feels the pain bloom up his spine as he slowly slides down from the wall. He blurrily glances over at Amy and Cream who are struggling in their restraints and watching him with terrified eyes.

Sonic pulls himself up shakily, but stumbles back a little before giving them a weak thumbs up.

Shadow walks back to where the emeralds are with purpose. He gazes down at them and murmurs to himself, "The seven miracle gems... that turn thoughts into power."

"Yes!" Eggman applauds, "Use the emeralds to destroy that hedgehog!"

Shadow glares up at the doctor and sneers, "I'll use the emeralds." He lets out a menacing laugh and continues, "I will use them to destroy everyone and everything here. Including *you*!"

Eggman takes a step back and looks frightened by Shadow's words, "No! You work for me! I released you!"

"That is true," Shadow responds blandly and holds his hands out. He watches the emeralds glow and spiral around him gently, "But I collected all of the emeralds and you did not use them for their intended purpose. You deceived me and, for that, you will die as well. Along with all the miserable life on this planet."

Eggman slams his fists down and shouts, "What good is the planet to me if you destroy it?!"

"It isn't about your wish, doctor," Shadow says with a sad smile, "It's about Maria's. She told me to take care of this planet and that is exactly what I'll do." The emeralds spiral around him faster and he can feel the energy surging inside his body.

Eggman watches in disbelief by what's happening, "No!" He turns to the blue hero, "Sonic, do something!"

Sonic sighs and leans against the wall with a look of disgust, "This again? How many times am I going to have to clean up *your* mess?"

"Please," Eggman begs with his hands folded together, "I promise I'll change! I'll—"

Sonic holds a finger up and cuts him off, "And how many times have I heard *that* line. You're not gunna to change. You'll never change." Sonic pushes himself off the wall and takes wobbly steps forward as he continues, "But I never change either. So, I'm going to fix this, but it won't be for you. It's for me. My friends." He stops and gazes at the dark hedgehog with glassy eyes, "For Shadow."

As the power surges through Shadow's body, all the black slowly turns to a white gold coloration. The chaos aura around him is intense and blindingly yellow. The power is satisfying, filling him to the brim with unimaginable strength.

"Shadow!" Sonic cries out to him as he makes his way over to the other. He puts on a brave face and keeps his body tall.

"There's no use in stopping me," Shadow says with a grin, "You are no match for me now." A chuckle hums at the back of his throat as he twists the inhibitors off his wrists one-by-one as they fall to the ground with a small 'cling.' The aura increases and he's surrounded by pure, raw energy.

"I won't let you hurt your friends," Sonic responds as he walks into the powerful aura. He winces as it burns and whips at his skin, "I won't let you hurt yourself."

"Friends?" Shadow asks with a laugh, "My friends have all died. Fifty years ago."

Sonic keeps his pace even when he feels his jacket, gloves, and the fabric of his socks burning away from him, the ashes falling away from him like dead leaves fluttering away from tree branches. He

keeps a slow pace, trying not to falter his steps.

Shadow's eyes widen when he sees the blue hedgehog actually walking toward him. He glares at him and clenches his fists, pushing more energy outwards. It sings at the ground and it fights with the electrical barrier around Eggman. The power whips and lashes out wildly around him.

Sonic watches him with sad eyes and he's pushed back a little by the additional force, but he continues his trek anyway. "Shadow," Sonic says softly, "I understand your sadness. Your grief. I understand the pain, but... I can't let you do this. Look around you. These are your loved ones. We care about you. I can't let you destroy everything you love."

"Understand?" Shadow questions as he feels the fire igniting in his chest. His aura increases, slightly piercing through the electrical energy shield. It thrashes out at the equipment around Eggman and the doctor ducks for cover. Shadow watches Sonic with hate in his eyes as he seethes, "You will *never* know how I feel!"

Sonic looks up at him with tired, sad eyes. He finally stands before him. The power and energy is almost blinding, but he can see Shadow through it all. He can see his big, pained eyes. Shadow swings back and throws a punch at Sonic and Sonic stops it with his hand. He winces as the energy sings at his skin, but he doesn't let go. He twines their fingers together. Shadow sends him another punch with his other hand, but the same happens.

"What *are* you!?" Shadow asks with heated fury.

Sonic disregards his statement and continues, "I know how you feel. When you lose someone... everything changes. The way you view life. The delicate way you handle friendships. The fear that anyone can just be taken away from you in the blink of an eye." A tear slips down Sonic's face and it dissipates in the intense heat before it can stream down his cheek, "When I lost you my entire life was altered, Shadow. I failed as a hero. As a friend. As a living being. It hurt worse than any physical pain."

Shadow studies Sonic's face carefully like he doesn't understand, "I... died?" Shadow gasps when he feels the pull of energy. It flows through his fingertips and he watches in awe as Sonic's blue coloration melts into yellow. The way his green eyes flicker away into a fiery red, remind him of his own eyes. Anger, hatred, and sadness reflecting back at him.

The aura dissipates slightly as Sonic controls the flow of power between them. Sonic leans in and presses his forehead against Shadow's and whispers, "Everything you did. Every decision you made. It all made sense in that moment. You were in the right. You sought out justice. And... I could feel that seed planted in my chest. I wanted justice for the people that hurt and manipulated you. I wanted revenge."

Shadow closes his eyes as he hears that loud ear piercing noise again. His mind delves into complete blackness and when he opens his eyes there's a light. Two small lights coming into view. He's on the outside looking in.

He and Sonic are in their super forms. Their arms extended as they use Chaos Control to teleport the falling ARK back into its orbital position. He remembers this. He remembers it well, but everything after is... foggy.

Sonic falters back and Shadow turns to grab him. They freefall together.

Sonic sees the energy slowly washing away and he smiles up at Shadow, "We did it. We actually did it."

Shadow just stares down at Sonic and then down at the planet that is getting bigger and bigger as they descend. He holds Sonic's hand and places his palm on the hero's cheek, "We did."

Sonic smiles sadly at him and laughs, "I didn't think this is how I'd go though. It seems kinda anticlimactic." He shrugs and looks away, "Oh well. At least I don't have to die alone."

Shadow's brow creases as he looks back up at the ARK. He gives it a calculative look before looking back down at Sonic. He shares the same sad smile with him and whispers, "My promise to Maria. To save the planet. You have been carrying out her wish for me while I was locked away. In a lot of aspects, you've become my earth."

Sonic's eyes widen when he hears that, "What do you mean?"

"In order to save the earth... I must save you," Shadow murmurs as he leans in to kiss him.

Sonic looks shocked at first, but he slowly melts into it and closes his eyes.

"The rings on my wrists... take them off, Sonic," Shadow whispers against his lips.

Sonic's hands slide down Shadow's arms and meet the cool touch of the rings. He slips them off one-by-one and opens his eyes to gaze into Shadow's.

"I have you to thank," Shadow says as his body ignites with its final surge of energy, "for taking me on the greatest adventure of my life. I just wish it wasn't my last."

"Shadow...?" Sonic asks with confusion.

"Please, carry out our wish, Sonic. For all the people who live down there," Shadow opens his palms and the energy is forced out of his body in one last burst as he shouts, "Chaos Control!!!"

It's a split second, but Sonic is looking down at Shadow in complete horror. He goes to reach for him, but the bright flash already happens. He's warped inside the ARK. His body falls onto the hard metal ground and the Chaos Emeralds break away from his body the moment of impact. He pulls his sore body up immediately and looks around, "Shadow?" He feels the grip of fear crushing his heart as his eyes dart around the room. "SHADOW!!!" Sonic cries out in agony when he realizes what had just happened. He looks down at the two rings in his hand and clutches them to his chest.

This couldn't be happening. He had to save him. He had to...

Sonic looks at the emeralds, dull from the energy used up in them. He gathers them together and tries anyway. "Come on," Sonic grits out as he tries to extract any kind of energy from them, "Come on!!!" Sonic falls to his knees and folds in on himself, his forehead pressed against the metallic ground as tears fall from his eyes. "Please," he whispers with his voice drenched with grief, "Please, give me your power. I... I need to save him."

Nothing happens though.

Sonic pounds his fist into the ground and he feels the anger creeping up his chest, gripping his heart. "Come on," Sonic seethes with anger, "Please!"

It's a slow motion, but energy does start to form around him. It's wild and intense and too much to handle. His quills darken and a black aura forms around him. The power is really satisfying. Euphoric even. He feels *strong*.

His fingers clench and dig at the metal ground under him. All he can think about is how he'll avenge

Shadow. Everyone will know his pain. He will not be forgotten.

Just as those thoughts flow into him, they dissipate. Even the negative power of the emeralds has been used up.

Sonic pulls himself up and away from the emeralds and grips his chest in fear. Those intrusive thoughts. That power.

“Sonic, are you okay?” Tails’ voice comes to life in his ear.

Sonic has to catch his breath. Everything in his mind. Everything is clicking together. His face contorts into agony once more when he thinks about Shadow. He can’t believe he’s gone. He can’t believe he couldn’t save him. He chokes on a sob, but quells the sorrow long enough to reply to Tails, “Y-yeah, I’m okay, bud. I’ll be up in a minute.” The moment he finishes his sentence though, he collapses on the ground and completely loses himself.

Shadow blinks his eyes back into focus. The darkness fades again and he’s staring into Sonic’s crimson eyes once more. He gives Sonic a look of awe and regret as he clenches his eyes shut, “I... hurt you. *So badly...*”

“No,” Sonic shakes his head and holds his hands tighter, “You just did the right thing. It was everyone else... They manipulated you and your power. They...” Sonic’s eyes shoot open when he feels Shadow’s arm around his waist and his lips against his.

Shadow pulls away, but just for a moment before embracing him tightly. He buries his face in Sonic’s neck and shakes his head, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Sonic can feel the energy weakening as their feet slowly meet the ground again. Sonic leans down as he picks up Shadow’s inhibitors and carefully places them back securely around his wrists. Sonic places his hands on Shadow’s shoulders and pushes him away gently before he whispers, “I have one more thing to take care of.” He turns to Eggman and walks toward the electrical barrier. The moment he touches it, it breaks away into sparks. He floats up to the platform Eggman is on and looks down at him.

Eggman smiles up at him and holds his hands together, “Thank you, Sonic! You saved us all again! You’re truly—“

Sonic’s hand snaps forward and he takes Eggman by the collar. He holds him up above him and glares at him through the fiery depths of his eyes. “I’m going to make sure you never hurt me or my friends again,” Sonic grits out as he opens his palm, feeling the chaos energy forming there.

“No! Please! Sonic, have mercy on me!” Eggman pleads as he struggles within Sonic’s grip.

“There’s no more mercy in my heart for you, Eggman,” Sonic whispers coldly. He can feel the energy shift around him. The yellow falls away from his body and is replaced with dark blue. The golden energy forming in his palm turns black and crackles like lightning.

Shadow appears next to him and he can feel his hand lock onto his wrist, “Don’t do this, Sonic.”

Sonic grits his teeth and can feel the tears forming at the corners of his eyes, “Just let me do this for you, Shadow!”

“This isn’t what I want,” Shadow states carefully, “And this isn’t you.” Shadow slides his hand up Sonic’s arm and loosens his grip on Eggman. He watches Eggman fall back onto the platform and turns to Sonic with a composed look, “A great hero once told me, ‘Greed is insatiable... and more

power is only going to fuel the fire.' I sought revenge, Sonic; but it never changed the past. It just brought more pain into the world. You're the light and the hope for the planet."

Sonic swallows thickly as he takes in Shadow's words. He feels his body getting weak. The darkness dissipates from him like smoke over flame and he returns to his true blue form once again.

Shadow catches him before the gravity can shift under his feet and he holds the blue hero securely to his side. He sees Eggman slowly sneaking away, but his hand snaps up and grabs the doctor by the back of the collar. "I may not believe in revenge anymore, but I *do* believe in justice, doctor. You're going away for a long, long time."

"You have your memories?" Sonic asks quietly.

Shadow glances down at Sonic with a faint smile, "I've gotten so used to having such a fragmented memory that it feels strange to be able to remember everything so vividly."

He floats down to the ground again and looks around. All of Sonic's friends are standing around them. Even Amy and Cream, who Shadow is sure were saved by Rouge's lock picking skills. Shadow only finds it fitting that he tosses Eggman in the prison those two were contained in until dispatch arrives.

Sonic looks at each of his friends with a look of shame and can feel the guilt eating at his chest, "Guys... I'm sorry."

Everyone seems to be in awe still, but Amy is the first one to step forward. "No, Sonic. You wouldn't have felt the need to do that if we didn't rely on you so much. We didn't realize how much pressure we were putting on you. It must have been awful to hold onto that pain alone. We made you feel like you couldn't come to us about anything because you were the leader. Things need to change. We *all* need to contribute and stay strong in the face of adversity. We can't keep relying solely on you."

"Amy..." Sonic watches her with wide eyes as if that's the last thing he'd expect to hear from her.

Amy gestures to Shadow with a smile, "Shadow taught me that I needed to rely on and do things for myself. And, ya know, there's something very liberating about that."

Rouge is holding onto Knuckles and the echidna frowns when he hears her words, "Sorry, Sonic..."

Sonic shakes his head and smile softly at him, "No, you were half right. I do need to let you guys grow as fighters. I was putting a lot of pressure on you too, Knux."

Shadow finds himself walking over to Sonic's side. He feels Sonic's hand take his and knit their fingers together. Sonic smiles at him and Shadow looks away a bit embarrassed.

Knuckles smirks at the dark hero and says, "Thanks for knocking some sense into me."

Shadow cringes, "I'm sorry I... I'm sorry for everything."

Rouge smiles at him, "You were being controlled, hon."

Shadow just nods, but he still feels regret.

"This doesn't change how we see you, Mister Shadow," Cream says with a smile, "You're still a hero in our eyes."

Shadow looks down at the rabbit girl with a look of astonishment, "...hero?"

They all smile and nod in agreement and Shadow feels a bit blown away. The warmth in his heart spreads across his chest and he feels welcome. He makes eye contact with each one of them before whispering, "And all of you are...my friends."

Rouge's eyes sparkle as she hugs Knuckles a bit too roughly, "Oh! Shadow admitted we were his friends!"

Shadow gives her a bland look before turning to Sonic, "I'm going to wait for GUN to arrive and guide them through this maze. Will you join me?"

Sonic looks back at the cell Eggman is being held in and shakes his head, "Nah, I'm gunna stay here. I just wanna make sure Eggman doesn't have any last tricks up his sleeves."

Shadow nods to him in understanding and is on his way. Rouge and Knuckles follow after him, carrying the restored Master Emerald.

Sonic slowly makes his way back to Eggman as he watches Amy smash the container open that is holding Omega's bird and Chocola. Tails and Cream fly up and rescue the two. He smiles at them before stopping in front of the doctor.

The blue hero stares down at him and frowns, "Ya know, it doesn't have to be like this. I know there's good in you and we'd probably be able to be friends if you had some common decency."

"Common decency," Eggman laughs and shakes his head, "And you? I finally got you to snap, didn't I?"

Sonic clenches his fist and looks away, "Why are you doing this? Is this a game to you? Why do you want me dead so badly? I'm just trying to live my life. Is that so wrong to you?"

"Yes," Eggman says as he sits back against the cell wall, "Your existence was never meant for you."

Sonic looks at his three friends who are still talking off in the distance. He returns his attention back to the doctor and takes a step forward lowering his voice, "What do you mean?"

"You think I don't know what you are," Eggman says with a gleam in his eye, "You aren't humble for the sake of being humble."

"So, this is about having a part of Chaos inside me," Sonic responds.

A wicked smile spreads across Eggman's face, "Not just a part of Chaos. The stone I used to control Shadow... it can control other things. It has properties to reverse and control literally everything. That's the soul of Chaos. You were created using the Master Emerald. If you become one with the soul of Chaos, you will literally be the reincarnation of Chaos himself."

Sonic isn't following him, "And what does that have to do with anything?"

"It has to do with everything," Eggman explains as he folds his hands neatly together, "My grandfather had two children: one boy and one girl. The boy became a scientist and helped him aboard the ARK. He had a daughter: Maria."

"My mother stayed on Earth to further study the properties of Chaos. She was also trying to develop a cure for Maria's illness. She was going to scrap her project when she found out that her niece had passed on, but when she gave birth to a boy with the same illness she continued her research and

created project Sonic 30 years later.”

Sonic eyes him suspiciously and takes a step back, “...You have the same illness as Maria.”

Eggman nods with a pleasant smile like he’s happy Sonic is catching on.

“But... Why didn’t you tell me? I would have helped you find a cure. It’s like... inside me, right?” Sonic asks frantically.

Eggman’s laughter is quiet and slowly melts into hysterics, “Don’t you see? In order to synthesize the serum, I’d have to extract a portion of your brain. I’d have to *kill* you in order to accomplish that.” Eggman pulls his sleeve back and reveals the silver robotic limb, “I’ve been keeping myself alive by robotizing my failing body parts and I’ll remain human as long as my mind is still intact. And even if it isn’t, I’ve been constantly downloading my memories onto a database.”

Sonic stumbles back with a look of disgust, “That is twisted.”

“It’s survival,” Eggman points out with a grin, “My mother failed me. She created you, but didn’t have the heart to kill you in order to save me: her own child. She set you free in a little place you might have heard of.”

“...Green Hill,” Sonic whispers lightly.

“Bingo,” Eggman smirks, “No memory. No recollection of what you were. No context of anything around you. Yet you were foiling my evil plots before you could even speak. It’s quite fascinating actually.” Eggman continues with a sly look, “Although when I released Chaos into the world, you started having an interesting reaction. Haven’t you? Your abilities became stronger, you were having visions, and your brain was linking up with its. The truth came to you the moment you became one with it. Am I correct?”

“Why didn’t you just use Chaos?” Sonic asks hesitantly.

“Because that wasn’t actually Chaos. It was just the rage fueled embodiment of Chaos. Anger taking basic form with no vessel. You are a vessel though, Sonic. And I knew the only thing that could beat you was something just as powerful as you,” Eggman explains before standing up. He looks down at the blue hero through the bars of his cell and states, “You’re right about one thing, my friend. We will never change. We will continue to fight one another until one of us perishes. And your kind heart will be your undoing.”

“I don’t have to listen to this,” Sonic says with a laugh as he turns away, “Try to kill me all you want. I have an eternity to kick your butt, Egg-head!”

Eggman snickers and responds, “Must be nice to meet another immortal like you. Probably feels less lonely, but... how do you think Shadow will react when he finds out the key to saving Maria’s life has been staring him in the face this whole time?”

Sonic stops and feels his heart clench. He doesn’t look back at the doctor, but pain is written all over his face. He forces a cheerful tone when he replies, “I don’t know? I guess that’s food for thought for you while you’re sitting in a *jail cell*.”

“I suppose so,” Eggman nods with a grin, “I’ll have so much to think about.”

Sonic tries not to let what Eggman said get to him. He just stands with his back to him the whole time until Shadow returns with the commander and their squad. The agents take Eggman into custody and the doctor shares one more look with Sonic before being taken away.

Sonic turns away with a grim look until Shadow returns to his side. Sonic gives him a wavering smile until he sees what's in his hand. It was the green gemstone Eggman was using to control Shadow. Sonic makes eye contact with him.

"Please, take this into your possession before GUN assesses the area. You're the only one I trust it with," Shadow explains softly.

Sonic lifts his hand up to take it, but stops, "Shadow...?"

Shadow raises an eyebrow, "Yes?"

Sonic looks away and is silent for a moment. He shakes his head and takes the stone from him. "Uh... Nothing," Sonic says sheepishly, "I uh... I love you too."

Shadow chuckles and places a hand on his cheek, "Yes, I remember you telling me so."

Sonic blushes and feels really embarrassed.

"I have to go now," Shadow informs him as he leans in to kiss his cheek, "but I'll stop by your brother's place after my shift is over."

"Right, Shads! You do your thing," Sonic says with a cocky grin as he salutes him.

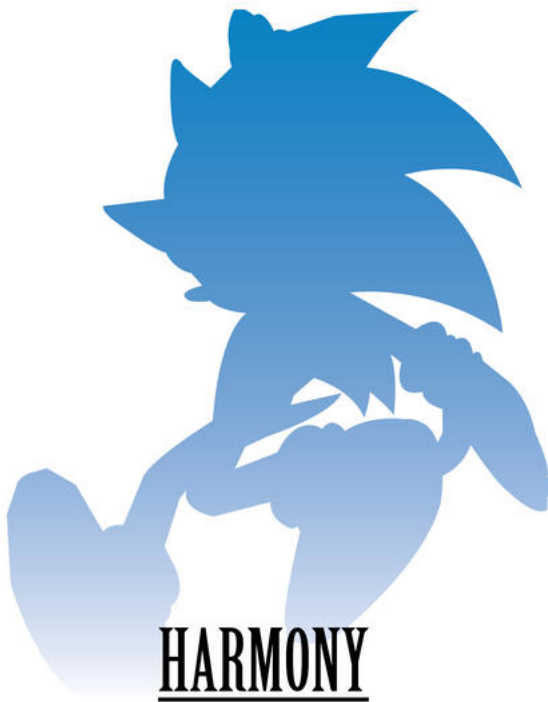
Shadow cracks a smile despite himself and salutes back to him before turning away, returning to his commander's side.

Sonic grips his hand tightly before opening it. He looks down at his palm and notices that the stone is gone. He looks around the ground to make sure he hadn't dropped it until he feels the warmth in his chest. He looks down and sees the soft green glow beating with his heart before it dulls down again. He swallows back his anxiety and remembers Eggman's words.

"If you become one with the soul of Chaos, you will literally be the reincarnation of Chaos himself."

Sonic places a hand to his chest and clutches it. He hopes those words were just the ramblings of a madman.

Peace



Chapter Twelve: Peace

Sonic and his friends regroup at Tails' workshop. Sonic is sitting on the stairs with the bird in his hands. His finger traces the red streak going down its head and wonders if Shadow's DNA really is spliced with it. He sighs and doesn't want to think about how Shadow is going to have to release it a second time, but he's sure Shadow won't leave him like he had last time. Not after all of that.

Tails walks out and sits next to him, "You okay?"

"Yeah, bud," Sonic replies, even though his voice is a bit more mellow than usual.

"Everyone agrees that you deserve a well earned vacation," Tails states with a cheerful voice.

Sonic just laughs under his breath.

"You're really quiet," Tails points out as he places a hand to his back.

"I just have a lot on my mind," Sonic explains, "I'll be back to myself in a day or two. You know me."

Tails nods slowly, "Yeah." He pulls his legs up to his chest and looks up at the sky, "I'm sorry I didn't know how much you were hurting after the ARK incident. I knew you were off, but I never thought twice of it. Although, I did notice how you gave Rouge one of Shadow's inhibitors. What happened to the other one?"

Sonic smiles sadly and looks away, "It's under my pillow. Think he'll want it back?"

Tails laughs when he sees Sonic laughing, "I guess Eggman made new ones when he captured Shadow."

Sonic glares down at his feet and nods with certainty, "I'm sure he did."

Tails leans against Sonic in a reassuring gesture and smiles, "You don't have to worry about mean old Dr. Eggman anymore. He's finally on Prison Island like it should be."

Sonic nods, "Good riddance."

Sonic just hopes it'll hold him.

As the sun gets closer to the horizon, Sonic makes his way inside with his friends. He's glad at how upbeat everyone is. Things seem lighter like getting all of this off his chest was what he and everyone else needed.

The blue hero is enjoying himself so much that he doesn't even notice Shadow slipping in the door and wrapping an arm around his shoulders when he walks up to him. Sonic is surprised when Shadow stays for some small talk with everyone. He even promises Cream that he'll work with her in training her newly formed chao. Sonic just has to snicker to himself because Cream is probably one of the most overpowered members of their team now because of it.

As everyone takes their leave, Shadow and Rouge stay behind. They go to release the bird one more time, but it flies around and circles back, chirping wildly. It seems like it doesn't want to leave. When it flies into Tails' workshop and patters across the robotic body of Omega, they all know what it means. Rouge nearly cries with joy on the spot.

Tails gets to work immediately. He inserts the bird back into its energy source and activates all of the systems.

Omega's body slowly rises and his eyes flicker a bit until they light up fully. The robot scans the area before looking down at its metallic hands. He clutches them and his voice box comes to life, "E-123 Omega. Rebooted and ready for orders."

"Well," Rouge chimes in with excitement as she flutters into his arms, "I order you to give me a big ol' hug, you beautiful hunk of metal!"

"Initiating hug," Omega says as his arms fold around Rouge.

Rouge kicks her legs happily and can barely fit her arms around the robot's large body as she hugs him back.

"Hmph," Shadow folds his arms across his chest and smiles at the scene in front of him before he turns to walk away.

"Wait," Omega says to him.

Shadow stops and glances over his shoulder at the robot, before turning to him.

Omega places Rouge down as delicately as someone would a butterfly and he trudges over to the dark hero. He stands before Shadow and leans down to his eyelevel, "Thank you, Shadow. I am very grateful that you wanted to free me, but I do not require freedom. When I left I was alone. What I require is the company of my friends."

Shadow feels his eyes growing glassy and he closes them before turning away, “Whatever you want, Omega.” Shadow can’t fight the relieved smile that crosses his face.

“Photo analysis,” Omega states as his body whirls like it’s loading, “Shadow, your facial features are different from when I was last booted up.”

Shadow glances at him with a confused look.

“They are less tense,” Omega reiterates, “I will update that into my database.”

“It’s because...” Shadow starts to say with embarrassment, “I missed you and I’m glad you’re back.”

“I will also add that to my database,” Omega states before holding his arms out, “Do you require a hug like agent Rouge?”

Shadow lifts his hand up and lowers Omega’s arms, “No, thank you.” Shadow does lean in and place his forehead against the yellow metal plate just above his eyes. Shadow closes his eyes and it’s like he can sense the energy the bird is omitting. He does feel connected with Omega and now that he knows that the bird is part of him like Black Doom once was, the whole concept of the hive mind thing is less terrifying and more comforting. He slowly pulls away and smirks up at the robot, “Just don’t go soft on me. I still need that firepower of yours for our missions.”

Omega lifts his arms in the air and his hands convert into machine guns, “I am Omega. I am always ready for a fight. I am the ultimate machine of destruction.”

Shadow finds himself laughing at that, “Glad to have you back, Omega.”

“Group hug!” Rouge shouts as she wraps her arms around the two and pulls out her phone. She takes a dozen selfies and Shadow is requesting she print some out for him. Rouge just curls her lip in disgust and tells him to get on social media. She ultimately agrees to print them out for him though.

Sonic is watching by the entrance of the garage and smiling at the three. He places his hand on Tails’ head and ruffles his hair, “Let’s give them some space, buddy.”

Tails nods in agreement and turns to walk back inside.

Just as Sonic gets to the door, Shadow stops him. He lingers on the steps and gives him a confused look.

Shadow makes his way over and explains, “I have some vacation time coming up and I was wondering...”

A wide smile spreads across Sonic’s face, “Whatever you’re asking me, I’m sure it’s a big ‘Heck Yeah!’ Where are we going?”

“Well,” Shadow responds a bit nervously, “I heard Emerald Coast is beautiful this time of year.”

Sonic’s face heats up and snickers, “I’m down with that, Shads.”

“Excellent,” Shadow smirks, liking Sonic’s response. His hand slides up the back of Sonic’s head and he leans in to kiss him deeply. When he feels Sonic’s lips moving in unison with his, he moans and pulls Sonic in closer until their bodies align.

“Get a room, you two,” Rouge shouts over to them.

Shadow pulls away when he sees the two staring at them and his whole face is beat red.

“Downloading that comeback into my database,” Omega states, “Filing it under: Hilarious.”

Rouge bursts into uncontrollable laughter and smacks Omega on the large metallic arm.

“I uh... I’ll inform you of when I have time off at a later date,” Shadow says, fumbling over his words as he rushes down the steps. He doesn’t even wait for his teammates to catch up with him. He just skates away as quickly as he can.

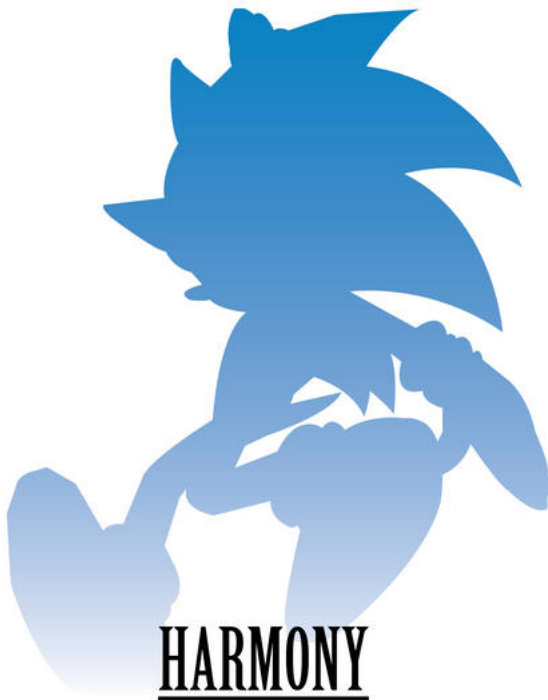
Sonic stands by the door with a smile still plastered on his face. Seeing Shadow flustered like that was kind of cute. He places his fingers to his mouth and still feels the warmth there.

This really was love. He feels it with the very fiber of his being.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Chapter Thirteen: Epilogue

“I... I don’t know about this, Shadow!”

“It’ll be fine. I’ve got you.”

Sonic’s foot touches the water, but he jolts back instantly when the waves wash up to his ankles. He cowers behind Shadow as if ebony hero could shield him from the entire ocean. Sonic shakes his head frantically, “Y-ya know, why don’t we get some ice cream and soak up some rays instead!”

Shadow sighs in exasperation and turns to Sonic, “Relax. I modified my shoes. I’m able to switch the rockets over to air thrusters in an instant.” He looks over the blue hero and stifles a laugh, “Besides, I’m sure you’re well equipped to handle this situation.”

Sonic crosses his arms across his chest. Or at least he tries to with the arm floaties and lifejacket strapped around him. “I still don’t know why you’re making me do this,” Sonic says with a pout.

“We’re at the beach,” Shadow states like that’s enough. He tosses down the innertube (which, of course, looks like a golden ring) and gestures to it, “Get on.”

Sonic grumbles and stomps over to it. He flinches again when the waves roll back in, but he does manage to slip on the rubber tube. He doesn’t look happy though. He just juts his lip out and pouts.

“Good,” Shadow says with a pleased smile. He leans down and pushes the blue hero farther down the shore as the water gets deeper and deeper. Shadow lets Sonic latch onto his arm and he almost feels bad when Sonic closes his eyes and tries to find his happy place.

As they drop off into deeper waters, Shadow’s shoe hum to life and he guides them around gently.

He sees Sonic slowly easing up and finally opening his eyes. He looks around and smiles with excitement, “We’re doing it!”

Shadow nods to him, “Yes, we are.”

Sonic eases back and folds his arms behind his head, “Ya know, maybe the water isn’t so scary after all.”

“I told you, there was nothing to worry about--!” Shadow is cut off and the dark hedgehog’s body is suddenly submerged under the water.

Sonic jolts up and looks around frantically, “Shadow?” Sonic reaches his arms down desperately as he tries to feel around the water for him. When he doesn’t feel or see him anywhere, his stomach drops. Did his shoes malfunction? Is he drowning? He has no way of knowing and he starts panicking, “Shadow!?”

A moment later, Shadow’s amused tone is heard from behind him, “I was going to shoot out and surprise you, but you looked so sad. I didn’t mean to *scare* you.”

Sonic whips his hand up, spins himself around, and splashes him, “You’re such a jerk! I was worried sick!”

Shadow floats back over to the innertube and folds his arms against it, looking up at the distraught hero, “It’s revenge from when you did the same to me.”

“Thought you didn’t believe in revenge,” Sonic says snottily as he kicks his feet into the water quickly and splashing water right at Shadow’s dumb, smug face.

Shadow winces when he feels the salt water being splashed at him, making his eyes sting. “Come now. It was just a joke,” Shadow tells him as he grabs Sonic by the ankles to stop him.

“Yeah? Jokes are funny! You suck at—Wah!” The innertube tilts on a wave and Sonic slips off. He frantically flails his arms about even though the lifejacket and water wings are keeping him afloat, “Help! I’m drowning!!!”

“No, you’re not,” Shadow states with a snicker.

“Yes, I am! Get a lifeguard! Call the coastguard! Call the *Navy*!” Sonic shouts overdramatically.

Shadow rolls his eyes and wraps his arms around Sonic’s waist, pulling him in. “I’m sure the SEALs are a bit busy at the moment,” Shadow informs him in a joking manner, “Hopefully, I’ll suffice.”

Sonic settles down a little when he feels a bit more stable. He still pouts and looks away when he mumbles, “I guess you’ll have to do.” Sonic shoves his finger into his chest roughly and says, “I’m still mad at you though.”

“That’s fair,” Shadow responds with a smirk, “Is this the closest you’ve ever been to the water?”

Sonic looks down at how the water is up to his chest and he looks away with a blush. No, the closest

he's been to the water was in his super form when he was fighting Chaos, but he was surrounded by a barrier of chaos energy so it didn't really count.

"Yeah..." He grumbles.

"How does it feel?" Shadow asks.

"Okay," Sonic answers, like he's a stubborn kid.

"Good," Shadow murmurs as he leans in and gives Sonic a well deserved kiss.

Sonic melts against it and wraps his arms securely around Shadow's neck. Their bodies align and Sonic braces his feet on Shadow's shoes, feeling the lulling vibrations of his thrusters. He feels Shadow shift his leg forward so he can lean against it a bit more comfortably. He smiles against the kiss in appreciation and tilts his head to the side to reward Shadow for the kind gesture.

Shadow accepts it and opens his mouth wider to invite Sonic's tongue inside. He moans when he feels the heat of it and presses and slides their tongues together. He loves how Sonic's grip tightens on him, but this time it isn't out of fear. It's want. He slides his knee between Sonic's legs and he gets a delicious croon from it.

"Not here," Sonic whispers.

He knows. He just likes to tease him. That's reserved for later.

Shadow kisses the little bit of skin of Sonic's chest that is still exposed and places a tender kiss against his neck before pulling away. He reaches over for the innertube and helps Sonic back on it before asking, "Think you'll be okay here while I test these out?"

Sonic huffs and kicks his feet a little, "I guess. As long as you don't pretend to drown again."

Shadow nods, "You have my word."

"Fine, fine," Sonic says as he waves him off, "Just give me a show."

Shadow nods with a smirk and floats back a considerable distance. He reaches the deeper part of the water and waits patiently. He feels the ocean moving under him as the water rises and falls. He glances behind him and sees the swell as he angles his feet against it, picking up speed. The water rises up and he boosts faster to keep up with it. As the water climbs in height, it dips over and the large wave appears. Shadow's shoes blast to life and he jumps out from the water and rides the wave, his shoes traversing the swell of the water. He aims and angles himself in Sonic's direction and Sonic looks completely horrified. Shadow chuckles a little and just before the wave hits the horrified hedgehog, he scoops Sonic up into his arms and skates upward. He boosts faster along the wave as it barrels over.

Sonic closes his eyes tightly and holds onto Shadow's shoulders, "This is awful! What were you thinking!? Shadow!!!"

Shadow whispers to him, "Open your eyes."

Sonic slowly opens one eye and then the other. He looks up and all he sees is shimmering, clear blue. They're inside the barrel of the wave. Sonic watches in awe and hesitantly reaches his hand out to touch the liquid wall of it, but pulls his hand back.

Shadow sees this and gently takes Sonic's hand and guides it out again, feeling as the water moves

against their fingertips. He quickly returns his hand to support Sonic's weight again and just admires with a calm smile as the water cascades around Sonic's fingers.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Shadow murmurs.

"Yeah, and a little scary," Sonic comments, but doesn't take his eyes off it.

Shadow gasps when he hears the crashing behind them and sees that the barrel is closing in on them. He leans forward and increases his speed. The crashing follows them and gets closer, but Shadow grits his teeth and keeps his ground. His shoes flare to life a moment later and they shoot forward, flames flickering and steaming the water under them. He smirks when they get close to the exit and fly out before the wave can close in on them.

Shadow spins and his shoes die down slowly, dipping them back into the water.

"That experience was both simultaneously cool and terrifying," Sonic says as he feels every hair on his body pricking.

"You survived, didn't you?" Shadow points out, "And with all the stunts I've witnessed you doing, I mistook you for a daredevil."

"Yeah," Sonic nods, "but none of them involved me actually getting *into* the water."

Shadow goes to snicker, but a wave knocks him under and he gets caught in the undertow. Sonic stays on the surface because of his 'safety gear' and watches as their innertube floats toward him. Shadow bursts out of the water taking in a large gasp of air and grabs onto the tube tightly. "Okay... Maybe that's enough water for today," Shadow comments, seeing where Sonic is coming from.

Sonic stifles his laughter, but doesn't say anything.

As they get back to shore, Sonic collapses against the towels that are set up on the sand. He purposely lays on Shadow's black one out of spite. That and Shadow's always seems to be warmer. He smiles as he feels the sun's warmth on his skin. "This is more like it," Sonic states gleefully.

Shadow takes the blue towel and dries off. He lets it hang across his shoulders as he looks back out into the ocean. He's more determined than ever to learn how to traverse it. It's wild and untamed and he kind of likes that. "Just admit you had a little fun with me," Shadow says.

"Okay, fine," Sonic replies, "Like... a little. Just a teeny, tiny bit. I wouldn't put it on my list of top ten things I find fun though."

Shadow rolls his eyes, "Right, but burning in the sun is one of them."

"Who said I was burning?" Sonic asks with a huff, "It's called *simmering*."

"With that pale complexion?" Shadow asks. He's taken off guard as Sonic throws something at him. He reaches out and catches it on instinct. When he looks down he realizes it's sunscreen. He raises an eyebrow and smirks down at him.

"Hey, you're the one who's worried about me burning," Sonic retorts.

"Worried?" Shadow shakes his head, "I never said I was worried."

Sonic gives him a knowing look and crosses his arms across his chest, "Uh-huh. Just get down here and put it on me."

“Are you so helpless you can’t do it yourself?” Shadow responds.

Sonic shrugs, “No, I could. It was just an offer.”

“A really bossy offer,” Shadow teases him and slips the towel off his shoulders.

“Hey, if you don’t wanna touch me it’s cool. I mean, I only went into the *ocean* for you. No big deal or anything,” Sonic replies a bit grumpy.

“Ah. So, that’s the reason for your sour mood,” Shadow says as if it had just clicked. He unfolds the towel next to Sonic and sits on it. He gazes down at the lounging hedgehog and admires each inch of his creamy skin. He takes Sonic’s hand and outstretches his arm as he begins to apply some of the sunscreen to his skin. “I *am* very grateful you did that for me,” Shadow says with a sincere tone.

Sonic glances up at him for a moment and looks away with embarrassment, “Y-yeah?”

“Yes,” Shadow nods, “Very valiant.”

“Hey. What can I say? A hero through and through,” Sonic says a bit too cocky.

“The way it should be,” Shadow whispers.

When the sun starts to go down, they head back to Shadow’s. Sonic is exhausted from their day out and flops down on the bed instantly. His quills are sticking up every which way as his face is practically smashed into the pillow and Shadow is shaking his head and smiling at the scene.

He makes sure all of his alarms and his radio are off before climbing into bed next to him. As he pulls the sheets over himself, he feels Sonic roll over and cuddle closer. He wraps an arm around him and pulls the blue hero close to his chest. He closes his eyes and takes in a deep breath smelling the sunscreen and sea salt still in the air as his breaths even out, falling into content relaxation.

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The next day, Shadow wakes to him hugging his pillow. His eyes slowly open as he remembers the day before. He blinks and slides his hand around the sheets, realizing he’s alone in bed. He pulls himself up quickly when the scent of pancakes hits his nose.

“No, no, no, no!” Shadow pulls himself out of bed quickly, stumbling over his radio in the process and shoving the door open. “Sonic!” Shadow rushes into the kitchen and stops when he sees his kitchen table laid out nicely and a batch of perfectly cooked pancakes resting in the center.

“Oh, hey. You’re awake,” Sonic says with a smile as he finishes drying the pan he had washed.

Shadow looks bewildered by what’s presented in front of him, but eases his posture a little. He carefully walks over to the table and points to it, “You did this?”

“Maybe,” Sonic says sheepishly, “Are you mad?”

Shadow lets out a relieved laugh and pulls Sonic into a tight hug, “No, thank you.”

“Of course, Shads,” Sonic replies a bit confused, but pats him on the back regardless, “but let’s eat before it gets cold.”

Shadow agrees and sits down with him. He listens to Sonic go on about how there’s a tutorial for literally any food ever on the internet and how he wants to try and make chili dogs by scratch. Shadow just nods to him, takes a bite, and then stops.

Sonic stops talking mid-sentence when he sees Shadow's face and he cringes, "That bad?"

Shadow rests his hand on Sonic's and turns to him with a soft smile, "No, they're perfect."

"Alright!" Sonic thrusts his fists in the air in celebration.

Shadow looks away while Sonic is distracted with his victory pose and wipes a single tear away. The flavor had instantly taken him back in time when he'd share breakfast with Maria. He doesn't know how, but Sonic had figured out how to add an ingredient he's been missing these past couple years.

Shadow glances at his photos on the wall and smiles up at them one-by-one. He thinks about how he's lived a pretty full life up until this point and it's only just begun. His eyes rest on the most recent picture of him and Sonic, smiling at the idea of how bright their future will be.

Chapter End Notes

Alright. That's all she wrote. This is the end.

I'll take a small break and put the link to the next part of this series here when it's up. Or if you want to like, follow me or however this website works, you can do that too.

Hope you enjoyed the first part and I'll see you guys soon with part 2! :)

Update:

Here's part two: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/17840993/chapters/42098894>

I also put it in a series so it's a little more organized.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!